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REPRESENTATIVE ESSAYS ON THE  
THEORY OF STYLE



# REPRESENTATIVE ESSAYS ON THE THEORY OF STYLE

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## PREFACE

THE practical object of this book is defined by the various treatises and handbooks for rhetorical study now in the field. These are (1) the many excellent text-books on the subject that have appeared in the last twenty-five or thirty years; (2) books of what is called rhetorical analysis, approaching the study of composition through examination of distinguished stylists; (3) treatises on the main types of literary method, as description, narration, exposition, and argumentation, often accompanied by precept and rule for the writing of themes; and (4) books of general and wholesome counsel in literary affairs. Excluding these classes, one has left the very numerous essays on the theory of style, and it is the chief of these in English, written by distinguished authors, that are here presented. They are selected from a contemporary rather than a historical point of view, and taken collectively, they represent the more important bearings of the subject with as little repetition and in as much variety of idea as possible. Newman's essay may be regarded as an introduction, in that it states the general problem of literature. The essays of De Quincey, Spencer, and Lewes follow, with statements of general principles and exposition of methods of a suggestive and interesting sort. Stevenson, particularly, and Pater are somewhat more confined; and Mr. Harrison's essay is an example of the safe, practical talk, the name of which is legion.

This volume may, therefore, be regarded as supplementing the more common and useful classes of books spoken of in the foregoing paragraph. It contains a body of ideas, certainly, that moderately advanced students of rhetoric should be familiar with. The material is interesting, it is not without excellence as a means of disciplining the discriminative faculties, and it will serve as an introduction of the subject of style from the wider and more scientific point of view. This general problem is stated in the introduction; the questions and notes are written to suggest several of the larger and the smaller issues.

Merely as a matter of fact, no student of the subject can help being grateful to Professor F. N. Scott of the University of Michigan for his excellent special editions of the essays of De Quincey and Spencer and of Lewes's *The Principles of Success in Literature*. *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* by the same scholar and Professor C. M. Gayley of the University of California will be of great use to any one who would pursue the subject further than the confines of the present volume. The bibliographies in Volume I, Chapter III, Part I, are valuable, and I have made constant reference to them. A few additional citations will be found in the introduction and the notes of this volume. I have translated all passages in foreign languages where the meaning is not quite clear from the context.

W. T. B.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,  
June 14, 1905.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I

"WE shall never learn the affinities of beauty; for they lie too deep in nature and too far back in the mysterious history of man. The amateur, in consequence, will always grudgingly receive details of method, which can be stated but can never be wholly explained."<sup>1</sup> Whoever will be at pains to peruse the numberless definitions of the term *style* will in course of time perceive that Stevenson states the difficulty; whether or not the reality of style lie "too deep in nature and too far back in the mysterious history of man," it is certain that the larger number of definitions of the term, as well as the essays on the subject, even if they abandon practical details in the search for principles underlying a body of phenomena, rarely succeed even in approaching an explanation of the idea of style. De Quincey frankly admitted the difficulty when he said, "It is a natural resource, that whatsoever we find it difficult to investigate as a result, we endeavour to follow as a growth. Failing analytically to probe its nature, historically we seek relief to our perplexities by tracing its origin."<sup>2</sup>

The host of attempts at definition, however, speak clearly of one fact — there is a variety of things which a great many people have agreed to call *style*, something that is or is not present to the consciousness of the reader, as of the amateur in other arts besides literature, to which he gives the name to conjure with. The "proper words in proper

<sup>1</sup> *On Style in Literature.*

<sup>2</sup> *Style, Part II.*

places" of Swift, the "le style est de l'homme même" of Buffon, the "sa manière de s'exprimer" of M. Brunetière, all betoken something of which the presence or the absence is felt. A singular connotation, an ill-placed word, a hackneyed phrase, reveal, in some way, to the alert reader, an original, a vulgar, or a commonplace personality, an inexact thought or ineptitude at ascertaining the tone of the audience. The fact for which these definitions stand, considered apart from any particular term and referred to the widest audience, evidently lies somewhere in the multiform human consciousness, and it is the object of the legion of writers on the subject to find terms in which to comprehend the general fact. In what terms shall the reality be expressed? — that is the question which underlies the problem of style.

The difficulty raised in this question the practical rhetorician avoids by accepting a working definition; he determines to use the term *style* in a sense, based so far as possible on the common phenomena, but suited to his needs and used as unequivocally as possible. In such definitions style is usually regarded as something apart from invention, or the thought, and is related to the manner or the medium of expression, as clearly, among the formal essayists also, with Pater and Stevenson. Such working definitions, however, vary in scope from the following: "Style, then, might be defined as that use of words by which they convey more than their dictionary meaning — the personal use of language, the artistic use of language, this is style"<sup>1</sup> to one of such breadth as this: "*Style*, as I shall use the term, means simply the expression of thought or emotion in written words; it applies equally to an epic, a sermon, a love-letter, an invitation to

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Baldwin, *A College Manual of Rhetoric*, p. 198.

an evening party.”<sup>1</sup> And it must be admitted that these definitions are as sensible as any.

The uncertainty as to just what is meant by the term as it is generally used is illustrated in an interesting manner by the essay of Newman printed in this volume. In spite of his reputation as a careful thinker and a clever logician, to say nothing of his own excellent command of “the twofold Logos,” he nevertheless speaks of style in a somewhat confusing way, though he by no means invests the term with the haziness of popular usage. He writes, in paragraph 9, as if style were distinct from phraseology, idiom, composition, rhythm, and eloquence. Again, the idea that it is a peculiarly personal thing underlies the whole thesis, and this idea of personality assumes a national significance in paragraph 10 and in his remarks on Cicero in paragraph 19. It is furthermore related to thought, is “a thinking out into language” (paragraph 11) and is related to matter as well as to mind. In the phrase “delicacy and beauty of style” (paragraph 14) it may be said to refer to an abstract ideal of excellence, just as the angels of Fra Angelico may be said to be goodness without personality. It has also to do with the occasion (paragraph 19), varies with it, and hence may be said to fall into different types (paragraph 23). The sum of the matter (paragraph 32) seems to be that it concerns (1) the thought, (2) the personality of the writer, and (3) the audience. The ambiguity of the term in popular usage is even greater. Thus Spanish style, say, is bad; it is also, with equal truth,—in Cervantes, for instance,—very good; the discrepancy arising from difference in point of view.

<sup>1</sup> Barrett Wendell, *English Composition*, p. 4.

## II

Bearing in mind the fact that writers on the subject of style are doing no more than attempting to express what is for them a reality of more or less moment and to give some account of the very evident experience called *style*, the student of the subject may find it enlightening to examine the different points of view from which the idea of style has been interpreted in even so small a number of essays as those of the present volume. These points of view deal with the attitude of writers toward the term rather than the different branches of knowledge, as psychology or ethics, in the light of which the facts have been stated. Of these branches of knowledge there will be more to say presently; for the time being, it is well to indicate merely the senses in which the term is used by these and a few other noteworthy essayists.

1. Spoken of as related to the thought, *style* is adequate, exact expression, and is good in proportion as it precisely follows the idea. This is the conception, roughly, of Pater's term "mind in style," the reason for Symonds's insistence on harmony between matter and expression,<sup>1</sup> for the importance given to clearness and precision in textbooks of rhetoric, for Mr. Harrison's counsel to avoid style in the "higher" sense, and it is expressed to some degree in De Quincey's term *Organology*, in Renton's difficult discourse on the logic of the matter<sup>2</sup> and Lewes's "law of sequence." Expanding this conception until it includes modes of thought, we have types of style, and hence speak of a narrative style, of a historical style, of an argumentative style. Walter Bagehot<sup>3</sup> analyzes style from this point

<sup>1</sup> *Essays Speculative and Suggestive: Notes on Style*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Logic of Style*.

<sup>3</sup> *Literary Studies*, Vol. II.

of view when he speaks of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning as examples, respectively, of the pure, the ornate, and the grotesque art of poetry, and the same motive underlies Coleridge's fragment.<sup>1</sup> This is evidently one of the commonest meanings — style as the precise expression of an idea, or, typically, of a kind of thought.

2. Speech in its normal condition presumably contemplates some hearer or body of hearers, and in this relation *style* becomes effective expression. In this sense it is more than the precise setting out of an idea; it adapts itself to the needs of the hearer or reader. Hence the mental states of the audience must be understood and, especially in oratory, there must be knowledge of what will be effective appeal. For this reason Aristotle devotes a large part of his rhetoric to an analysis of the passions and the ideas which will arouse a hearer's interest, and hence some modern writers, as Professor Bain,<sup>2</sup> have placed much reliance on examination of the human emotions. As far as style is concerned, this conception exactly underlies Spencer's famous phrase "the economy of the reader's attention."

3. *Style* is also very frequently spoken of as if its revelation of the individuality of the writer or speaker were the main thing. From this point of view it becomes personal expression. This conception is at the root of Newman's distinction between literature and science, and the same idea occurs in Pater's phrase, "a writer's personal sense of fact," whether it be so-called "mind" or "soul in style." When Symonds speaks of a "personal style,"<sup>3</sup> when Mr. Harrison wisely advises youth to avoid tricks of writing and condemns Carlylese, Ruskinese, Meredithe, and every

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, N.Y., 1853, Vol. IV.

<sup>2</sup> *English Composition and Rhetoric*.

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on Style*.

other *es*, “past, present, and to come,” and when Mr. William Watson<sup>1</sup> separates *style* from *a style*, they have in mind this idea of style with even more rigorous denotation. This meaning is exclusively the property of the definitions quoted before, the “style est de l’homme même” of Buffon and the “sa manière de s’exprimer” of M. Brunetière. In a wider sense this conception of personality in style gives rise to so-called “national” style or to the style of an epoch and it is on this prospect of style that Professor Saintsbury<sup>2</sup> and Symonds<sup>3</sup> turn their gaze.

4. There is a fourth point of view which appears most conspicuously in Stevenson’s essay in this volume. *Style* is here regarded as a thing of superficial beauty. A pattern in words is to be wrought, expressing some idea, to be sure, but the finished work has style only in so far as it succeeds in its aim of building a beautiful fabric. De Quincey’s *Mechanology* expresses somewhat the same idea, though it is by no means in so uncompromising or so complete a form, and something of the same notion underlies his insistence on style as distinct from matter, just as it underlies Pater’s delight in structure. Rhythm, harmony, cadence, and such things may be regarded as involved in this meaning of style, though they may be rightly analyzed—as, for example, with Spencer—as ministering to the more utilitarian end of “economy.”

5. There is an ideal of literary excellence in which vague universe *style* becomes what is sometimes called permanent literary expression. The term is here one of endearment rather than accuracy, and blandly draws the veil over ignorance instead of unmasking the features of exactitude. Mr. Harrison has in mind this meaning when he

<sup>1</sup> *Excursions in Criticism: The Mystery of Style*.

<sup>2</sup> *English Prose Style*.

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on Style*.

advises students to avoid the cultivation of style, as does Professor Raleigh,<sup>1</sup> when he affirms that style cannot be taught. The term is delightfully vague in the so-called "inevitable phrase," and in Mr. Watson's *style*, "the anti-septic of literature," contrasted with *a style*.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold had this meaning in view, though he cast eyes at the morals of the matter, when he begged to refer whoever would know the quality of good poetry to certain touchstones of excellence.<sup>3</sup> Flaubert's habit, of which Pater speaks, is an illustration of this meaning of a term which, in general, has not been, and probably may not be, satisfactorily defined. Evidently, when style in this sense deals with matter of great moment or of universal import we have style as the "great art" of Pater's essay, but, for the most part, one cannot come much nearer to the fifth conception of style than to be, regarding any particular passage, in a state of pleasing certitude that no phrase could be altered for the better, that here, at last, are "proper words in proper places."

It is evident that these points of view very nearly cover the chief meanings in which this term *style* has been used. They are not mutually exclusive, for it is clear that some stretching of Spencer's generalization or Swift's definition may be thought to include all the others. Of them all Stevenson's is probably the most definite; style is to him, in prose, precisely four things, in poetry five, but the conception is more definite simply because it is narrower, and the elements which go into each of these four things, or five things, need a good deal more exposition. On the other hand, most of the definitions are of a very general kind, and before they furnish the student with that "solid

<sup>1</sup> *Style.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Mystery of Style.*

<sup>3</sup> *Essays in Criticism, Second Series: The Study of Poetry.*

food" for which Mr. Harrison pleads, in lieu of stones and serpents, they would have to be reduced to more concrete terms. Thus, a complete exposition of M. Brunetière's "*sa manière de s'exprimer*" would require an analysis of all writers individually, in so far as they present any manner capable of notation. Spencer's generalization with regard to economy, approaching the subject from the point of view of the reader or hearer rather than that of the writer, would equally, for a thorough exposition, require knowledge of the various and varying receptivity of a large number of people or of collective groups of people.

The question, then, "What is the reality?" has evidently been answered by these writers in a creditable variety of ways but by no one in a way which covers all the facts and is at the same time clear. The uncertainty arises simply because human idiosyncrasy, especially when one is dealing with so intangible a thing as style, does not allow the same facts to be present to any two persons, and because, even if that uniformity regarding the existence of facts were possible, there would be the other danger of disagreement with regard to the relative value of the facts.

### III

Evidently the two great objects in the study of style are the finding terms in which to state a very intricate fact, and the devising of methods whereby to enable writers to produce the reality. The first of these is an object of scientific inquiry, the second a matter of practical instruction. Concerning the first of these—in what sense style may be said to have reality—the analysis has been made (1) in terms of the subject itself or some allied art, (2) as

a matter of history, and (3) by reference to sciences, particularly those which deal with human consciousness.

The first point of view has proved to be a not very satisfactory one from which to approach the subject, since it has evidently led to that discrepancy of opinion which has been pointed out in the preceding section. Such opinions, at their worst, often deal with mere matters of detail, or of arbitrary rule, or of personal fancy, and who can loose the bands of Orion or bind the sweet influence of the Pleiades? Of the terminology which expresses these fancies, that is, the resemblance to other things, Mr. Garrison furnishes good illustrations in the words where he condemns the "preciousness" of Stevenson, for example, as well as when he speaks, becoming himself a castaway, of the "mighty diapason" of Milton, or of George Eliot as too "enamelled and erudite." These phrases are not exact but suggestive through the medium of other arts; "we yield to sympathy," as Burke says,<sup>1</sup> in a famous theory of style of which some of his notable pictures<sup>2</sup> are the best illustration, "what we refuse to description."

The failure of such terms, accordingly, to represent a fact leads very likely to the other extreme, perhaps equally futile — the mechanical analysis of sentence structure, the derivation of words, and the like — and results in somewhat arbitrary rules concerning the length of sentences and the right composition of vocabulary. More broadly and sanely applied, analysis from the same point of view groups the phenomena of style under such famous principles, now much in vogue in the teaching of rhetoric, as unity, emphasis, and coherence, which evidently have

<sup>1</sup> *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Part V.

<sup>2</sup> As, for example, the picture of the descent of the Hyder Ali upon the Carnatic in *The Nabob of Arcot's Debts*.

application to other arts as well, but which fail in that they do not explain the causes, "deduced from the nature of man," why they should be observed, and which still leave their illustration to the industry of the writer or the adroitness of the reader.

What has just been said is pretty general. It will be clearer to any one who will take the pains to read in historical sequence the chief essays on style, to see how they have attempted to phrase the fact.<sup>1</sup> Since it is not the purpose of this volume directly to enter into the history of the matter, it will be enough to indicate the method and the starting-point of such investigation and leave the work of pursuing it to the ambitious student. As to method, it is evidently best to note the ideas on the subject that the first investigators presented and to see what points in detail or modifications of general principles or facility of method were added by succeeding writers. Thus—for this concerns the starting-point—the idea which Plato (in the *Phædrus*) had of true rhetoric, as opposed to that of the Sophists, consisted in (1) a knowledge of the truth and the principles of justice, and (2) a knowledge of the soul of the person to be addressed. From the last there sprang the corollary, suggestive of De Quincey's analysis of publication, that oratory was a better form of discourse than writing, since the audience was much more numerous and since the speaker had more power over it than a writer over his reader. He also spoke, as a detail, (3) of the necessity of careful arrangement in the exposition of ideas. Aristotle, writing half a century later, went much more into detail and is rightly regarded as the source of

<sup>1</sup> For a list of the principal works on style arranged in chronological order see Gayley & Scott: *Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*, Vol. I, pp. 233–234. Cf. Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*.

all subsequent study. Defining rhetoric as "a faculty of discovering all possible means of persuasion on any subject," he divided his subject into three main parts: *invention*, or the finding of adequate proofs for the purposes of persuasion, whether in the subject, the character of the speaker, or the character of the audience—in short, what to say; *style*, or the knowledge of how to say a thing; and *arrangement*, or the order in which ideas should be presented.<sup>1</sup> Of these, it is evident that Plato had had something to say about the first and the last, but whether he thought of style as did Aristotle is doubtful; concerning none of these categories is he so thorough as his successor, nor does he handle the human soul in so clever a way. Now style, broadly defined as the art of saying things, Aristotle treated as the manner of gaining and heightening effects, whether through knowledge of "the sources from which facts themselves derive their persuasiveness," "the disposition or setting out of the facts by the style," or declamation. He accordingly recognized in his discussion the following main conditions of style:—

1. Distinctions in types of style, as, in general, that between poetry and prose, and, in particular in prose, the appropriateness of one kind of style to the kind of subject, as the literary style and the controversial style, each with its special effects; and also, from a more logical point of view, style as the "jointed," where there was no visible attempt to end the sentence, and the "periodic," where the sentence was rounded out.

2. The social necessity of lucidity and appropriateness in prose, since the proper function of speech is to make meanings clear and to do this with as little artifice as possible. Hence, he declared any excessive use of com-

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Translated by J. E. C. Welldon.

pound words, rare words, numerous, long, and unseasonable epithets, and inappropriate metaphors to be in bad taste.

3. Purity in the use of language, that is, correctness of usage and syntax as the true basis of style; hence obscurity in punctuation, and the wrong yoking or phrasing of words, were errors.

4. Methods of heightening the effect of what might, say, be written with mere propriety, in simple diction. This was to be got through (1) dignity, which was, in turn, to be gained, still within the limits of prose, by the somewhat mechanical practice of avoiding the simple name of a thing in favour of the definition of it (or the reverse, if more agreeable), by the use of metaphor and epithet, by the use of the plural for the singular, by the repetition of the article, etc. ; (2) rhythm, as opposed to metre ; (3) antithesis of various kinds; and (4) clever sayings.

Briefly, what Aristotle did was to regard style somewhat as did Spencer, as a thing with its chief sanction in social necessity, the different classes of which accordingly gave rise to different types of style. His analysis of usage, also, comprehends to some degree the same idea, but his devices for heightening effects are not so clearly of that nature; they seem rather to be formal and empirical rules. It is with this latter aspect of the Aristotelian system that most of his successors, like the brilliant Horace, and many writers of the eighteenth century in England were occupied; Longinus is perhaps the chief exception. It is probably not until the time of De Quincey and Spencer, at least in England, that stress is laid on the former and more scientific part of the Aristotelian doctrine. Of these two men De Quincey's contribution is remarkable, aside from its wit and its dwelling on the importance of the subject,

for its attempt to show the causal relations of certain phenomena, to find explanation for these in contemporary conditions. Spencer's essay is noteworthy in that it tries to find the secret of style, not in arbitrary rule or in outside conditions, but in the state of mind of the person to whom a given piece of style is addressed.

Turning from the history of the matter, then, we find that, in the third place, style is explained by other bodies of knowledge, particularly by those which have to do with human consciousness. It might be interpreted by physics and chemistry, if we knew enough, just as De Quincey hints at a botanico-mechanical interpretation in the lack of linen rags in the ash-barrels of ancient Greece. Of other modern sciences, psychology is probably the most fruitful: Spencer and Lewes are quite right in insisting on a knowledge of the mind of the recipient and "psychological necessity." Unfortunately, neither carries his thesis out: Spencer, after stating it with admirable clearness, gives some explanations and illustrations chiefly of individual, *a priori* value, based to no great extent on the facts of "psychological demand"; and in this respect they are no better than any preceding illustrations; the arrangement of particular sentences, for example, is still an affair of the ear of the writer rather than the receptivity of the reader. Lewes, following Spencer, speaks much of the new point of view; but his explanations are metaphysical, transcendental, Coleridgean, Emersonian, stimulating, "soulful," anything but scientific, and his so-called "laws of style" are, for the most part, as old as Aristotle. But it is along this line that much progress may be expected, and various recent investigations from the psychological point of view may be scientifically, if not practically, fruitful. The inquiry into the metaphor, for example,

published by Miss Buck,<sup>1</sup> changes one's views considerably, and though it will not help one to write better, will make one more tolerant toward the so-called "mixed metaphor," the sport of all formal rhetoricians from time immemorial. One apprehends that "mixed metaphors" have emotional rather than rational value and are to be judged as expressions of feeling pure and simple, perhaps the more genuine because the more "mixed" and chaotic. So too with the interesting *Studies in Literary Psychology*<sup>2</sup> of "Vernon Lee": an analysis of wording or syntax is made, quite apart from biographical knowledge, to reveal the personality of the writer and to point out the chief spiritual and intellectual characteristics of his style. In all these cases the fact is stated as a fact, and the absence of merely mechanical analysis or arbitrary rule is a gain in freedom as well as knowledge. A generalization like Lewes's to the effect that a writer should be true to himself is evidently supported by such analysis, in that it is evident that a writer cannot help being so.

Philology also has its important bearings, chiefly, of course, in the matter of usage. Philology attempts to tell us what is true with regard to language, and hence, in its bearing on style, inclines one to substitute for arbitrary rules as to what vocabulary, for example, is good and what bad, a range and variety of vocabularies, any one of which may be regarded as appropriate—and hence good style—for any particular occasion or place. Pater's essay takes as its standard of good vocabulary the practice of literary scholars, and limits the term *style* to that; a book like Greenough and Kittredge's *Words and their Ways in*

<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Buck, *The Metaphor: A Study in the Psychology of Rhetoric*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Syntax of De Quincey*, *Contemporary Review*, 84: 713; *The Rhetoric of Landor*, *C. R.*, 84: 856; *Carlyle and the Present Tense*, *C. R.*, 85: 386.

*English Speech*, however, clearly tells us, as a matter of fact, that there are a dozen types of vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> That is the fact, and it assuredly has its bearing on the study of style.

When Matthew Arnold, in his essay *On Translating Homer*, spoke of the "grand style simple" and the "grand style severe," and warned those who did not perceive the fact as he saw it that they should die in their sins, he was doing no more than to approach style from an ethical point of view. The same point of view is evident in Ruskin's discourse on the same subject.<sup>2</sup> Herein the fact of style lies in the grandeur of the character of the writer, the nature "exceptionally endowed," and the criterion of endowment or nobility of character may evidently be an ethical one. Style, however, from this point of view, has been treated emotionally rather than scientifically; with Arnold and Ruskin appeal is made to the character of the writer, rather than, as with much of the criticism of Bagehot and Pater, to the type or quality of his mind or personality. But it is quite possible and profitable to characterize style in ethical terms if one will have due regard to comparative values.

From this discussion it will be evident that the various attempts to state the reality of style, to tell what the fact is, have been made in many different ways, as by mechanical analysis of word and sentence; through analogy with other arts or branches of human activity, as in the vocabulary of architecture and painting; or in terms of scientific knowledge of the mind of the writer or the receptivity of the hearer. The number of ways that have been and are

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also M. Bréal, *Essay de Sémantique*, and O. Jespersen, *Progress in Language*.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Painters*, Vol. III.

being tried is great. Probably the most fertile field at present exploiting is the psychological, since it cultivates verification for, or weeds out false support of, the various arbitrary canons or general principles which have long been in vogue.

## IV

Coming to the second great object of the study of style — the means of making it a productive discipline — we find some divergence of opinion. Evidently Pater was of the belief that any sufficiently assiduous person might be capable of "good art," and Stevenson's doctrine of pattern implies, to some degree, the possibility of the student's acquiring the pattern habit. Stevenson<sup>1</sup> himself evidently studied style and learned to write in some such way. Spencer's theory, carried out into practice, should teach an intelligent and sympathetic person to write well in proportion as he had knowledge of the mental wear and tear of his reader, or feeling for it. It would be more difficult for the ordinary mortal to apply the principle of beauty, urged by Lewes, to his own work, since Lewes does not really tell what beauty is. One with logical mind or by the aid of logic could learn to be "sequential," and could attain a mechanical variety merely by bearing in mind the "law of variety," but that would not necessarily be effective variety, any more than an unintelligent alternation of slow and fast delivery in baseball would be effective pitching. The dicta of Mr. Harrison and Professor Raleigh<sup>2</sup> to the effect that style should not be thought about and cannot be taught, apply to style in the so-called "higher sense"; and this seems to be a fairly common opinion.

<sup>1</sup> *A College Magazine.*

<sup>2</sup> *Style.*

Perhaps the best way of gaining a clearer idea of the problem would be by turning back to the analysis in Section II of this introduction. In the light of our present knowledge it is evident that the attempt to treat style as a means of valuable discipline should be confined to the first two points of view — style as exactness, and style as related to the hearer or reader. A student probably can be trained to write correctly and exactly, in short, to say definitely what he has in mind — especially in exposition — to state the gist of some thought, to link together his ideas in orderly and coherent paragraphs, — mechanically coherent, if nothing more. This is evidently what most good text-books in rhetoric strive chiefly to do. He may also be trained to some degree in the regarding of his audience, in some knowledge of their capacity, and may in time learn to avoid tediousness; but here the school of actual practice, of real speaking or real writing, is better than the theoretical one. Possibly when psychology, say, has reduced to definite laws the various phenomena of interest, a student may be able, through style, to touch people without an immediate experience of them.

Stevenson's way of looking at style, as a matter of technical excellence, may be pedagogically valuable in so far as it inspires students to pay more heed to harmony and grace, but it might be so much dwelt upon as to result in bombast, padding, obscurity, and all the paraphernalia of a "fatal fluency," of the style once for all satirized in Swift's *A Critical Essay on the Faculties of the Mind*. What is most valuable in this point of view may be comprehended in the second.

The third and last points of view have nothing to offer to the would-be writer. Style may be personality, but it

would be time worse than thrown away for a teacher to tell a student that the value of his writing lay in the expression of his personality. The personality that has to be expressed with labour and travail is probably not worth expressing ; moreover, in one sense it will come out willy-nilly, and we shall merely see the jejuneness and the posturing of it all. He who cultivates his individuality is lost. Better one sound thought clearly put — a possible end — than the fatuity of losing the essence in the by-product. So, too, with style in the "highest" sense. Any piece of writing will be permanent literary expression only in so far as the readers, rather than the author, choose so to regard it. One simply cannot forecast the future, and one is better busied than with worrying how posterity will take one's masterpieces.

Talent and genius apart, then, the only profitable teaching of style has to do with (1) making clear the idea and (2) making it "take." Everything else may be banished into comparative darkness. Indeed, the second of these depends on so multiform a variety of conditions that it may be doubted whether it may be taught in any way more helpfully than by the precepts and illustration given in any sensible treatise on rhetoric, which are numerous, until the great school of practice "tries out" the good writers from the bad. Perhaps the most that can be done by way of formal teaching — certainly the best thing, in the opinion of the present writer, that can be done — is to train students in the definite expression of a number and variety of definite ideas, and let time, personality, society, and the reading of good books indirectly and gradually take care of the rest. He who teaches a student to say what he means has done good service, has not only taught him to express himself more clearly, but has straightened his thinking, has given

him something solid: think first, write afterwards, the scholar's part.

Plato, in the dialogue entitled *Phædrus*, puts into the mouth of Socrates the following summary of a long discussion which, *pace* De Quincey and with the approval of Mr. Harrison, may be taken as perhaps the weightiest general utterance on the teaching of style. “Until a man knows the truth of the several particulars of which he is writing or speaking, and is able to define them as they are, and having defined them again to divide them until they can be no longer divided, and until in like manner he is able to discern the nature of the soul, and discover the different modes of discourse which are adapted to different natures, and to arrange and dispose them in such a way that the simple form of speech may be addressed to the simpler nature, and the complex and composite to the more complex nature — until he has accomplished all this, he will be unable to handle arguments according to the rules of art, as far as their nature allows them to be subjected to the rules of art, either for the purpose of teaching or persuading, — such is the view implied in the whole preceding argument.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by Jowett, Vol. I, p. 487.



# JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

## LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

### A LECTURE IN THE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND LETTERS

#### I

1. WISHING to address you, Gentlemen, at the commencement of a new Session, I tried to find a subject for discussion, which might be at once suitable to the occasion, yet neither too large for your time, nor too minute or abstruse for your attention. I think I see one for my purpose in the very title of your Faculty. It is the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Now the question may arise as to what is meant by "Philosophy," and what is meant by "Letters." As to the other Faculties, the subject-matter which they profess is intelligible, as soon as named, and beyond all dispute. We know what Science is, what Medicine, what Law, and what Theology; but we have not so much ease in determining what is meant by Philosophy and Letters. Each department of that twofold province needs explanation: it will be sufficient, on an occasion like this, to investigate one of them. Accordingly I shall select for remark the latter of the two, and attempt to determine what we are to understand by Letters or Literature, in what Literature consists, and how it stands relatively to Science. We speak, for instance, of ancient and modern literature, the literature of the day, sacred literature, light literature; and our

<sup>1</sup> From *The Idea of a University*. The address here printed was written in 1858.

lectures in this place are devoted to classical literature and English literature. Are Letters, then, synonymous with books? This cannot be, or they would include in their range Philosophy, Law, and, in short, the teaching of all the other Faculties. Far from confusing these various studies, we view the works of Plato or Cicero sometimes as philosophy, sometimes as literature; on the other hand, no one would ever be tempted to speak of Euclid as literature, or of Matthiæ's Greek Grammar. Is, then, literature synonymous with composition? with books written with an attention to style? is literature fine writing? again, is it studied and artificial writing?

2. There are excellent persons who seem to adopt this last account of Literature as their own idea of it. They deprecate it, as if it were the result of a mere art or trick of words. Professedly indeed, they are aiming at the Greek and Roman classics, but their criticisms have quite as great force against all literature as against any. I think I shall be best able to bring out what I have to say on the subject by examining the statements which they make in defence of their own view of it. They contend then, 1. that fine writing, as exemplified in the Classics, is mainly a matter of conceits, fancies, and prettinesses, decked out in choice words; 2. that this is the proof of it, that the classics will not bear translating;—(and this is why I have said that the real attack is upon literature altogether, not the classical only; for, to speak generally, all literature, modern as well as ancient, lies under this disadvantage. This, however, they will not allow; for they maintain,) 3. that Holy Scripture presents a remarkable contrast to secular writings on this very point, viz., in that Scripture does easily admit of translation, though it is the most sublime and beautiful of all writings.

3. Now I will begin by stating these three positions in the words of a writer, who is cited by the estimable Catholics in question as a witness, or rather as an advocate, in their behalf, though he is far from being able in his own person to challenge the respect which is inspired by themselves.

4. "There are two sorts of eloquence," says this writer, "the one indeed scarce deserves the name of it, which consists chiefly in laboured and polished periods, an overcurious and artificial arrangement of figures, tinselled over with a gaudy embellishment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the understanding. This kind of writing is for the most part much affected and admired by the people of weak judgment and vicious taste; but it is a piece of affectation and formality the sacred writers are utter strangers to. It is a vain and boyish eloquence; and, as it has always been esteemed below the great geniuses of all ages, so much more so with respect to those writers who were actuated by the spirit of Infinite Wisdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majesty with which never man writ. The other sort of eloquence is quite the reverse to this, and which may be said to be the true characteristic of the Holy Scriptures; where the excellence does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty, which is a double character, so difficult to be united that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human. We see nothing in Holy Writ of affectation and superfluous ornament. . . . Now, it is observable that the most excellent profane authors, whether Greek or Latin, lose most of their graces whenever we find them literally translated. Homer's

famed representation of Jupiter — his cried-up description of a tempest, his relation of Neptune's shaking the earth and opening it to its centre, his description of Pallas's horses, with numbers of other long-since admired passages, flag, and almost vanish away, in the vulgar Latin translation.

5. "Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpretations of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar, and one may venture to affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him so much in the original. The natural conclusion from hence is, that in the classical authors, the expression, the sweetness of the numbers, occasioned by a musical placing of words, constitute a great part of their beauties; whereas, in the sacred writings, they consist more in the greatness of the things themselves than in the words and expressions. The ideas and conceptions are so great and lofty in their own nature that they necessarily appear magnificent in the most artless dress. Look but into the Bible, and we see them shine through the most simple and literal translations. That glorious description which Moses gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which Longinus . . . was so greatly taken with, has not lost the least whit of its intrinsic worth, and though it has undergone so many translations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original. . . . In the history of Joseph, where Joseph makes himself known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him, at that instant none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to express their present joy or palliate their former injuries to him. On all sides there immediately ensues a deep and solemn silence; a silence

infinitely more eloquent and expressive than anything else that could have been substituted in its place. Had Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated classical historians, been employed in writing this history, when they came to this point they would doubtless have exhausted all their fund of eloquence in furnishing Joseph's brethren with laboured and studied harangues, which, however fine they might have been in themselves, would nevertheless have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occasion.”<sup>1</sup>

6. This is eloquently written, but it contains, I consider, a mixture of truth and falsehood, which it will be my business to discriminate from each other. Far be it from me to deny the unapproachable grandeur and simplicity of Holy Scripture; but I shall maintain that the classics are, as human compositions, simple and majestic and natural too. I grant that Scripture is concerned with things, but I will not grant that classical literature is simply concerned with words. I grant that human literature is often elaborate, but I will maintain that elaborate composition is not unknown to the writers of Scripture. I grant that human literature cannot easily be translated out of the particular language to which it belongs; but it is not at all the rule that Scripture can easily be translated either;—and now I address myself to my task:—

## 3

7. Here, then, in the first place, I observe, Gentlemen, that Literature, from the derivation of the word, implies writing, not speaking; this, however, arises from the circumstance of the copiousness, variety, and public circulation of the matters of which it consists. What is spoken

<sup>1</sup> Sterne, Sermon xlvi. N.

cannot outrun the range of the speaker's voice, and perishes in the uttering. When words are in demand to express a long course of thought, when they have to be conveyed to the ends of the earth, or perpetuated for the benefit of posterity, they must be written down, that is, reduced to the shape of literature; still, properly speaking, the terms, by which we denote this characteristic gift of man, belong to its exhibition by means of the voice, not of handwriting. It addresses itself, in its primary idea, to the ear, not to the eye. We call it the power of speech, we call it language, that is, the use of the tongue; and, even when we write, we still keep in mind what was its original instrument, for we use freely such terms in our books as "saying," "speaking," "telling," "talking," "calling"; we use the terms "phraseology" and "diction"; as if we were still addressing ourselves to the ear.

8. Now I insist on this, because it shows that speech, and therefore literature, which is its permanent record, is essentially a personal work. It is not some production or result, attained by the partnership of several persons, or by machinery, or by any natural process, but in its very idea it proceeds, and must proceed, from some one given individual. Two persons cannot be the authors of the sounds which strike our ear; and, as they cannot be speaking one and the same speech, neither can they be writing one and the same lecture or discourse,—which must certainly belong to some one person or other, and is the expression of that one person's ideas and feelings,—ideas and feelings personal to himself, though others may have parallel and similar ones,—proper to himself, in the same sense as his voice, his air, his countenance, his carriage, and his action are personal. In other words, Litera-

ture expresses, not objective truth, as it is called, but subjective; not things, but thoughts.

9. Now this doctrine will become clearer by considering another use of words, which does relate to objective truth, or to things; which relates to matters, not personal, not subjective to the individual, but which, even were there no individual man in the whole world to know them or to talk about them, would exist still. Such objects become the matter of Science, and words indeed are used to express them, but such words are rather symbols than language, and however many we use, and however we may perpetuate them by writing, we never could make any kind of literature out of them, or call them by that name. Such, for instance, would be Euclid's Elements; they relate to truths universal and eternal; they are not mere thoughts, but things: they exist in themselves, not by virtue of our understanding them, not in dependence upon our will, but in what is called the *nature* of things, or at least on conditions external to us. The words, then, in which they are set forth are not language, speech, literature, but rather, as I have said, symbols. And, as a proof of it, you will recollect that it is possible, nay usual, to set forth the propositions of Euclid in algebraical notation, which, as all would admit, has nothing to do with literature. What is true of mathematics is true also of every study, so far forth as it is scientific; it makes use of words as the mere vehicle of things, and is thereby withdrawn from the province of literature. Thus metaphysics, ethics, law, political economy, chemistry, theology, cease to be literature in the same degree as they are capable of a severe scientific treatment. And hence it is that Aristotle's works on the one hand, though at first sight literature, approach in character, at least a great number of them, to mere

science; for even though the things which he treats of and exhibits may not always be real and true, yet he treats them as if they were, not as if they were the thoughts of his own mind; that is, he treats them scientifically. On the other hand, Law or Natural History has before now been treated by an author with so much of colouring derived from his own mind as to become a sort of literature; this is especially seen in the instance of Theology, when it takes the shape of Pulpit Eloquence. It is seen too in historical composition, which becomes a mere specimen of chronology, or a chronicle, when divested of the philosophy, the skill, or the party and personal feelings of the particular writer. Science, then, has to do with things, literature with thoughts; science is universal, literature is personal; science uses words merely as symbols, but literature uses language in its full compass, as including phraseology, idiom, style, composition, rhythm, eloquence, and whatever other properties are included in it.

10. Let us then put aside the scientific use of words, when we are to speak of language and literature. Literature is the personal use or exercise of language. That this is so is further proved from the fact that one author uses it so differently from another. Language itself in its very origination would seem to be traceable to individuals. Their peculiarities have given it its character. We are often able in fact to trace particular phrases or idioms to individuals; we know the history of their rise. Slang surely, as it is called, comes of, and breathes of the personal. The connection between the force of words in particular languages and the habits and sentiments of the nations speaking them has often been pointed out. And, while the many use language as they find it, the man of genius uses it indeed, but subjects it withal to his own purposes, and

moulds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, aspirations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history, the exercises of his wit, of his humour, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect, does he image forth, to all does he give utterance, in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself and analogous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality, attending on his own inward world of thought as its very shadow : so that we might as well say that one man's shadow is another's as that the style of a really gifted mind can belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as a shadow*. His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal.

## 4

11. Thought and speech are inseparable from each other. Matter and expression are parts of one : style is a thinking out into language. This is what I have been laying down, and this is literature ; not *things*, not the verbal symbols of things ; not on the other hand mere *words* ; but thoughts expressed in language. Call to mind, Gentlemen, the meaning of the Greek word which expresses this special prerogative of man over the feeble intelligence of the inferior animals. It is called Logos : what does Logos mean ? it stands both for *reason* and for *speech*, and it is difficult to say which it means more properly. It means both at once : why ? because really they cannot be divided, — because they are in a true sense one. When

we can separate light and illumination, life and motion, the convex and the concave of a curve, then will it be possible for thought to tread speech under foot, and to hope to do without it — then will it be conceivable that the vigorous and fertile intellect should renounce its own double, its instrument of expression, and the channel of its speculations and emotions.

12. Critics should consider this view of the subject before they lay down such canons of taste as the writer whose pages I have quoted. Such men as he consider fine writing to be an *addition from without* to the matter treated of,—a sort of ornament superinduced, or a luxury indulged in, by those who have time and inclination for such vanities. They speak as if *one* man could do the thought and *another* the style. We read in Persian travels of the way in which young gentlemen go to work in the East, when they would engage in correspondence with those who inspire them with hope or fear. They cannot write one sentence themselves; so they betake themselves to the professional letter-writer. They confide to him the object they have in view. They have a point to gain from a superior, a favour to ask, an evil to deprecate; they have to approach a man in power, or to make court to some beautiful lady. The professional man manufactures words for them, as they are wanted, as a stationer sells them paper, or a schoolmaster might cut their pens. Thought and word are, in their conception, two things, and thus there is a division of labour. The man of thought comes to the man of words; and the man of words, duly instructed in the thought, dips the pen of desire into the ink of devotedness, and proceeds to spread it over the page of desolation. Then the nightingale of affection is heard to warble to the rose of loveliness, while the breeze of anxiety plays around

the brow of expectation. This is what the Easterns are said to consider fine writing ; and it seems pretty much the idea of the school of critics to whom I have been referring.

13. We have an instance in literary history of this very proceeding nearer home, in a great University, in the latter years of the last century. I have referred to it before now in a public lecture elsewhere ;<sup>1</sup> but it is too much in point here to be omitted. A learned Arabic scholar had to deliver a set of lectures before its doctors and professors on an historical subject in which his reading had lain. A linguist is conversant with science rather than with literature ; but this gentleman felt that his lectures must not be without a style. Being of the opinion of the Orientals, with whose writings he was familiar, he determined to buy a style. He took the step of engaging a person, at a price, to turn the matter which he had got together into ornamental English. Observe, he did not wish for mere grammatical English, but for an elaborate, pretentious style. An artist was found in the person of a country curate, and the job was carried out. His lectures remain to this day, in their own place in the protracted series of annual Discourses to which they belong, distinguished amid a number of heavyish compositions by the rhetorical and ambitious diction for which he went into the market. This learned divine, indeed, and the author I have quoted, differ from each other in the estimate they respectively form of literary composition ; but they agree together in this,—in considering such composition a trick and a trade ; they put it on a par with the gold plate and the flowers and the music of a banquet, which do not make the viands better, but the entertainment more pleasurable ; as if language were the

<sup>1</sup> *Position of Catholics in England*, pp. 101, 2. N.

hired servant, the mere mistress of the reason, and not the lawful wife in her own house.

14. But can they really think that Homer, or Pindar, or Shakespeare, or Dryden, or Walter Scott, were accustomed to aim at diction for its own sake, instead of being inspired with their subject, and pouring forth beautiful words because they had beautiful thoughts? this is surely too great a paradox to be borne. Rather, it is the fire within the author's breast which overflows in the torrent of his burning, irresistible eloquence; it is the poetry of his inner soul, which relieves itself in the Ode or the Elegy; and his mental attitude and bearing, the beauty of his moral countenance, the force and keenness of his logic, are imaged in the tenderness, or energy, or richness of his language. Nay, according to the well-known line, "facit indignatio *versus*,"<sup>1</sup> not the words alone, but even the rhythm, the metre, the verse, will be the contemporaneous offspring of the emotion or imagination which possesses him. "Poeta nascitur, non fit,"<sup>2</sup> says the proverb; and this is in numerous instances true of his poems, as well as of himself. They are born, not framed; they are a strain rather than a composition; and their perfection is the monument, not so much of his skill as of his power. And this is true of prose as well as of verse in its degree: who will not recognize in the vision of Mirza a delicacy and beauty of style which is very difficult to describe, but which is felt to be in exact correspondence to the ideas of which it is the expression?

## 5

15. And, since the thoughts and reasonings of an author have, as I have said, a personal character, no wonder that

<sup>1</sup> [Indignation makes verses.]

<sup>2</sup> [The poet is born, not made.]

his style is not only the image of his subject, but of his mind. That pomp of language, that full and tuneful diction, that felicitousness in the choice and exquisiteness in the collocation of words, which to prosaic writers seem artificial, is nothing else but the mere habit and way of a lofty intellect. Aristotle, in his sketch of the magnanimous man, tells us that his voice is deep, his motions slow, and his stature commanding. In like manner, the elocution of a great intellect is great. His language expresses, not only his great thoughts, but his great self. Certainly he might use fewer words than he uses; but he fertilizes his simplest ideas, and germinates into a multitude of details, and prolongs the march of his sentences, and sweeps round to the full diapason of his harmony, as if *κύδει γαίων*,<sup>1</sup> rejoicing in his own vigour and richness of resource. I say, a narrow critic will call it verbiage, when really it is a sort of fulness of heart, parallel to that which makes the merry boy whistle as he walks, or the strong man, like the smith in the novel, flourish his club when there is no one to fight with.

**16.** Shakespeare furnishes us with frequent instances of this peculiarity, and all so beautiful, that it is difficult to select for quotation. For instance, in Macbeth:—

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,  
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
 Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
 And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,  
 Cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff,  
 Which weighs upon the heart ?”

**17.** Here a simple idea, by a process which belongs to the orator rather than to the poet, but still comes from the

<sup>1</sup> [Exulting in his renown.]

native vigour of genius, is expanded into a many-membered period.

18. The following from Hamlet is of the same kind :—

“ ‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,  
Together with all forms, modes, shows of grief,  
That can denote me truly.”

19. Now, if such declamation, for declamation it is, however noble, be allowable in a poet, whose genius is so far removed from pomposness or pretence, much more is it allowable in an orator, whose very province it is to put forth words to the best advantage he can. Cicero has nothing more redundant in any part of his writings than these passages from Shakespeare. No lover then at least of Shakespeare may fairly accuse Cicero of gorgeousness of phraseology or diffuseness of style. Nor will any sound critic be tempted to do so. As a certain unaffected neatness and propriety and grace of diction may be required of any author who lays claim to be a classic, for the same reason that a certain attention to dress is expected of every gentleman, so to Cicero may be allowed the privilege of the “*os magna sonaturum*,”<sup>1</sup> of which the ancient critic speaks. His copious, majestic, musical flow of language, even if sometimes beyond what the subject-matter demands, is never out of keeping with the occasion or with the speaker. It is the expression of lofty sentiments in lofty sentences, the “*mens magna in corpore magno*.”<sup>2</sup> It is the development of the inner man. Cicero vividly

<sup>1</sup> [The voice for trumpeting great things.]

<sup>2</sup> [The great mind in the large body.]

realized the *status* of a Roman senator and statesman, and the “pride of place” of Rome, in all the grace and grandeur which attached to her; and he imbibed, and became what he admired. As the exploits of Scipio or Pompey are the expression of this greatness in deed, so the language of Cicero is the expression of it in word. And, as the acts of the Roman ruler or soldier represent to us, in a manner special to themselves, the characteristic magnanimity of the lords of the earth, so do the speeches or treatises of her accomplished orator bring it home to our imaginations as no other writing could do. Neither Livy, nor Tacitus, nor Terence, nor Seneca, nor Pliny, nor Quintilian is an adequate spokesman for the Imperial City. They write Latin; Cicero writes Roman.

## 6

20. You will say that Cicero’s language is undeniably studied, but that Shakespeare’s is as undeniably natural and spontaneous; and that this is what is meant, when the Classics are accused of being mere artists of words. Here we are introduced to a further large question, which gives me the opportunity of anticipating a misapprehension of my meaning. I observe, then, that, not only is that lavish richness of style, which I have noticed in Shakespeare, justifiable on the principles which I have been laying down, but, what is less easy to receive, even elaborateness in composition is no mark of trick or artifice in an author. Undoubtedly the works of the Classics, particularly the Latin, *are* elaborate; they have cost a great deal of time, care, and trouble. They have had many rough copies; I grant it. I grant also that there are writers of name, ancient and modern, who really are guilty of the absurdity of making sentences, as the very

end of their literary labour. Such was Isocrates: such were some of the sophists; they were set on words, to the neglect of thoughts or things; I cannot defend them. If I must give an English instance of this fault, much as I love and revere the personal character and intellectual vigour of Dr. Johnson, I cannot deny that his style often outruns the sense and the occasion, and is wanting in that simplicity which is the attribute of genius. Still, granting all this, I cannot grant, notwithstanding, that genius never need take pains,—that genius may not improve by practice,—that it never incurs failures, and succeeds the second time,—that it never finishes off at leisure what it has thrown off in the outline at a stroke.

21. Take the instance of the painter or the sculptor; he has a conception in his mind which he wishes to represent in the medium of his art;—the Madonna and Child, or Innocence, or Fortitude, or some historical character or event. Do you mean to say he does not study his subject? does he not make sketches? does he not even call them “studies”? does he not call his workroom a *studio*? is he not ever designing, rejecting, adopting, correcting, perfecting? Are not the first attempts of Michael Angelo and Raffaelle extant, in the case of some of their most celebrated compositions? Will any one say that the Apollo Belvidere is not a conception patiently elaborated into its proper perfection? These departments of taste are, according to the received notions of the world, the very province of genius, and yet we call them *arts*; they are the “Fine Arts.” Why may not that be true of literary composition which is true of painting, sculpture, architecture, and music? Why may not language be wrought as well as the clay of the modeller? why may not words be worked up as well as colours? why should not skill in

diction be simply subservient and instrumental to the great prototypal ideas which are the contemplation of a Plato or a Virgil? Our greatest poet tells us,—

“The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,  
And, as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.”

22. Now, is it wonderful that that pen of his should sometimes be at fault for a while,—that it should pause, write, erase, re-write, amend, complete, before he satisfies himself that his language has done justice to the conceptions which his mind’s eye contemplated?

23. In this point of view, doubtless, many or most writers are elaborate; and those certainly not the least whose style is furthest removed from ornament, being simple and natural, or vehement, or severely business-like and practical. Who so energetic and manly as Demosthenes? Yet he is said to have transcribed Thucydides many times over in the formation of his style. Who so gracefully natural as Herodotus? yet his very dialect is not his own, but chosen for the sake of the perfection of his narrative. Who exhibits such happy negligence as our own Addison? yet artistic fastidiousness was so notorious in his instance that the report has got abroad, truly or not, that he was too late in his issue of an important state-paper, from his habit of revision and recomposition. Such great authors were working by a model which was before the eyes of their intellect, and they were labouring to say what they had to say, in such a way as would most exactly and suitably express it. It is not wonderful that other authors, whose style is not simple, should be instances of a

similar literary diligence. Virgil wished his *Aeneid* to be burned, elaborate as is its composition, because he felt it needed more labour still, in order to make it perfect. The historian Gibbon in the last century is another instance in point. You must not suppose I am going to recommend his style for imitation, any more than his principles; but I refer to him as the example of a writer feeling the task which lay before him, feeling that he had to bring out into words for the comprehension of his readers a great and complicated scene, and wishing that those words should be adequate to his undertaking. I think he wrote the first chapter of his history three times over; it was not that he corrected or improved the first copy; but he put his first essay, and then his second, aside — he recast his matter, till he had hit the precise exhibition of it which he thought demanded by his subject.

**24.** Now in all these instances, I wish you to observe, that what I have admitted about literary workmanship differs from the doctrine which I am opposing in this,— that the mere dealer in words cares little or nothing for the subject which he is embellishing, but can paint and gild anything whatever to order; whereas the artist, whom I am acknowledging, has his great or rich visions before him, and his only aim is to bring out what he thinks or what he feels in a way adequate to the thing spoken of, and appropriate to the speaker.

**25.** The illustration which I have been borrowing from the Fine Arts will enable me to go a step further. I have been showing the connection of the thought with the language in literary composition; and in doing so I have exposed the unphilosophical notion, that the language was

an extra which could be dispensed with, and provided to order according to the demand. But I have not yet brought out, what immediately follows from this, and which was the second point which I had to show, viz., that to be capable of easy translation is no test of the excellency of a composition. If I must say what I think, I should lay down, with little hesitation, that the truth was almost the reverse of this doctrine. Nor are many words required to show it. Such a doctrine, as is contained in the passage of the author whom I quoted when I began, goes upon the assumption that one language is just like another language,—that every language has all the ideas, turns of thought, delicacies of expression, figures, associations, abstractions, points of view, which every other language has. Now, as far as regards Science, it is true that all languages are pretty much alike for the purposes of Science; but even in this respect some are more suitable than others, which have to coin words, or to borrow them, in order to express scientific ideas. But if languages are not all equally adapted even to furnish symbols for those universal and eternal truths in which Science consists, how can they reasonably be expected to be all equally rich, equally forcible, equally musical, equally exact, equally happy in expressing the idiosyncratic peculiarities of thought of some original and fertile mind, who has availed himself of one of them? A great author takes his native language, masters it, partly throws himself in to it, partly moulds and adapts it, and pours out his multitude of ideas through the variously ramified and delicately minute channels of expression which he has found or framed:—does it follow that this his personal presence (as it may be called) can forthwith be transferred to every other language under the sun? Then may we reasonably maintain that Beethoven's

*piano* music is not really beautiful, because it cannot be played on the hurdy-gurdy. Were not this astonishing doctrine maintained by persons far superior to the writer whom I have selected for animadversion, I should find it difficult to be patient under a gratuitous extravagance. It seems that a really great author must admit of translation, and that we have a test of his excellence when he reads to advantage in a foreign language as well as in his own. Then Shakespeare *is* a genius because he can be translated into German, and *not* a genius because he cannot be translated into French. Then the multiplication-table is the most gifted of all conceivable compositions, because it loses nothing by translation, and can hardly be said to belong to any one language whatever. Whereas I should rather have conceived that, in proportion as ideas are novel and recondite, they would be difficult to put into words, and that the very fact of their having insinuated themselves into one language would diminish the chance of that happy accident being repeated in another. In the language of savages you can hardly express any idea or act of the intellect at all: is the tongue of the Hottentot or Esquimaux to be made the measure of the genius of Plato, Pindar, Tacitus, St. Jerome, Dante or Cervantes?

**26.** Let us recur, I say, to the illustration of the Fine Arts. I suppose you can express ideas in painting which you cannot express in sculpture; and the more an artist is of a painter, the less he is likely to be of a sculptor. The more he commits his genius to the methods and conditions of his own art, the less he will be able to throw himself into the circumstances of another. Is the genius of Fra Angelico, of Francia, or of Raffaelle disparaged by the fact that he was able to do that in colours which no man that ever lived, which no Angel, could achieve in wood?

Each of the Fine Arts has its own subject-matter ; from the nature of the case you can do in one what you cannot do in another ; you can do in painting what you cannot do in carving ; you can do in oils what you cannot do in fresco ; you can do in marble what you cannot do in ivory ; you can do in wax what you cannot do in bronze. Then, I repeat, applying this to the case of languages, why should not genius be able to do in Greek what it cannot do in Latin ? and why are its Greek and Latin works defective because they will not turn into English ? That genius, of which we are speaking, did not make English ; it did not make all languages, present, past, and future ; it did not make the laws of *any* language : why is it to be judged of by that in which it had no part, over which it has no control ?

## 8

**27.** And now we are naturally brought on to our third point, which is on the characteristics of Holy Scripture as compared with profane literature. Hitherto we have been concerned with the doctrine of these writers, viz., that style is an *extra*, that it is a mere artifice, and that hence it cannot be translated ; now we come to their fact, viz., that Scripture has no such artificial style, and that Scripture can easily be translated. Surely their fact is as untenable as their doctrine.

**28.** Scripture easy of translation ! then why have there been so few good translators ? why is it that there has been such great difficulty in combining the two necessary qualities, fidelity to the original and purity in the adopted vernacular ? why is it that the authorized versions of the Church are often so inferior to the original as compositions, except that the Church is bound above all things

to see that the version is doctrinally correct, and in a difficult problem is obliged to put up with defects in what is of secondary importance, provided she secure what is of first? If it were so easy to transfer the beauty of the original to the copy, she would not have been content with her received version in various languages which could be named.

**29.** And then in the next place, Scripture not elaborate! Scripture not ornamented in diction, and musical in cadence! Why, consider the Epistle to the Hebrews — where is there in the classics any composition more carefully, more artificially written? Consider the book of Job — is it not a sacred drama, as artistic, as perfect, as any Greek tragedy of Sophocles or Euripides? Consider the Psalter — are there no ornaments, no rhythm, no studied cadences, no responsive members, in that divinely beautiful book? And is it not hard to understand? are not the Prophets hard to understand? is not St. Paul hard to understand? Who can say that these are popular compositions? who can say that they are level at first reading with the understandings of the multitude?

**30.** That there are portions indeed of the inspired volume more simple both in style and in meaning, and that these are the more sacred and sublime passages, as, for instance, parts of the Gospels, I grant at once; but this does not militate against the doctrine I have been laying down. Recollect, Gentlemen, my distinction when I began. I have said Literature is one thing, and that Science is another; that Literature has to do with ideas, and Science with realities; that Literature is of a personal character, that Science treats of what is universal and eternal. In proportion, then, as Scripture excludes the personal colouring of its writers, and rises into the region of pure and

mere inspiration, when it ceases in any sense to be the writing of man, of St. Paul or St. John, of Moses or Isaías, then it comes to belong to Science, not Literature. Then it conveys the things of heaven, unseen verities, divine manifestations, and them alone—not the ideas, the feelings, the aspirations, of its human instruments, who, for all that they were inspired and infallible, did not cease to be men. St. Paul's epistles, then, I consider to be literature in a real and true sense, *as personal, as rich in reflection and emotion, as Demosthenes or Euripides*; and, without ceasing to be revelations of objective truth, they are expressions of the subjective notwithstanding. On the other hand, portions of the Gospels, of the book of Genesis, and other passages of the Sacred Volume, are of the nature of Science. Such is the beginning of St. John's Gospel, which we read at the end of Mass. Such is the Creed. I mean, passages such as these are the mere enunciation of eternal things, without (so to say) the medium of any human mind transmitting them to us. The words used have the grandeur, the majesty, the calm, unimpassioned beauty of Science; they are in no sense Literature, they are in no sense personal; and therefore they are easy to apprehend, and easy to translate.

**31.** Did time admit I could show you parallel instances of what I am speaking of in the Classics, inferior to the inspired word in proportion as the subject-matter of the classical authors is immensely inferior to the subjects treated of in Scripture—but parallel, inasmuch as the classical author or speaker ceases for the moment to have to do with Literature, as speaking of things objectively, and rises to the serene sublimity of Science. But I should be carried too far if I began.

32. I shall then merely sum up what I have said, and come to a conclusion. Reverting, then, to my original question, what is the meaning of Letters, as contained, Gentlemen, in the designation of your Faculty, I have answered, that by Letters or Literature is meant the expression of thought in language, where by "thought" I mean the ideas, feelings, views, reasonings, and other operations of the human mind. And the Art of Letters is the method by which a speaker or writer brings out in words, worthy of his subject, and sufficient for his audience or readers, the thoughts which impress him. Literature, then, is, of a personal character; it consists in the enunciations and teachings of those who have a right to speak as representatives of their kind, and in whose words their brethren find an interpretation of their own sentiments, a record of their own experience, and a suggestion for their own judgments. A great author, Gentlemen, is not one who merely has a *copia verborum*, whether in prose or verse, and can, as it were, turn on at his will any number of splendid phrases and swelling sentences; but he is one who has something to say and knows how to say it. I do not claim for him, as such, any great depth of thought, or breadth of view, or philosophy, or sagacity, or knowledge of human nature, or experience of human life, though these additional gifts he may have, and the more he has of them the greater he is; but I ascribe to him, as his characteristic gift, in a large sense, the faculty of Expression. He is master of the twofold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other. He may, if so be, elaborate his compositions, or he may pour out his improvisations, but in either case he

has but one aim, which he keeps steadily before him, and is conscientious and single-minded in fulfilling. That aim is to give forth what he has within him; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that, whatever be the splendour of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has with him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity. Whatever be his subject, high or low, he treats it suitably and for its own sake. If he is a poet, “nil molitur *ineptè*.<sup>1</sup> If he is an orator, then too he speaks, not only “*distinctè*” and “*splendidè*,” but also “*aptè*.<sup>2</sup> His page is the lucid mirror of his mind and life—

Quo fit, ut omnis  
Votivâ pateat veluti descripta tabellâ  
Vita senis.”<sup>2</sup>

33. He writes passionately, because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly; he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose; he can analyze his subject, and therefore he is rich; he embraces it as a whole and in its parts, and therefore he is consistent; he has a firm hold of it, and therefore he is luminous. When his imagination wells up, it overflows in ornament; when his heart is touched, it thrills along his verse. He always has the right word for the right idea, and never a word too much. If he is brief, it is because few words suffice; when he is lavish of them, still each word has its mark, and aids, not embarrasses, the vigorous march of his elocution. He expresses what all feel, but all cannot say; and his sayings pass into proverbs among his people, and his phrases become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tesselated with the rich fragments

<sup>1</sup> [He does nothing inaptly.]

<sup>2</sup> [He so acts that in his old age his whole life appears as if graven on votive tablets.]

of his language, as we see in foreign lands the marbles of Roman grandeur worked into the walls and pavements of modern palaces.

34. Such pre-eminently is Shakespeare among ourselves; such pre-eminently Virgil among the Latins; such in their degree are all those writers who in every nation go by the name of Classics. To particular nations they are necessarily attached from the circumstance of the variety of tongues, and the peculiarities of each; but so far they have a catholic and ecumenical character, that what they express is common to the whole race of man, and they alone are able to express it.

## IO

35. If then the power of speech is a gift as great as any that can be named,—if the origin of language is by many philosophers even considered to be nothing short of divine,—if by means of words the secrets of the heart are brought to light, pain of soul is relieved, hidden grief is carried off, sympathy conveyed, counsel imparted, experience recorded, and wisdom perpetuated,—if by great authors the many are drawn up into unity, national character is fixed, a people speaks, the past and the future, the East and the West are brought into communication with each other,—if such men are, in a word, the spokesmen and prophets of the human family,—it will not answer to make light of Literature or to neglect its study; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the ministers of like benefits to others, be they many or few, be they in the obscurer or the more distinguished walks of life,—who are united to us by social ties, and are within the sphere of our personal influence.

# THOMAS DE QUINCEY

## STYLE<sup>1</sup>

### PART I

1. Amongst the never-ending arguments for thankfulness in the privilege of a British birth—arguments more solemn even than numerous, and telling more when weighed than when counted, *pondere quam numero*—three aspects there are of our national character which trouble the uniformity of our feelings. A good son, even in such a case, is not at liberty to describe himself as “ashamed.” Some gentler word must be found to express the character of his distress. And, whatever grounds of blame may appear against his venerated mother, it is one of his filial duties to suppose either that the blame applies but partially, or, if it should seem painfully universal, that it is one of those excesses to which energetic natures are liable through the very strength of their constitutional characteristics. Such things do happen. It is certain, for instance, that to the deep sincerity of British nature, and to that shyness or principle of reserve which is inseparable from self-respect, must be traced philosophically the churlishness and unsocial bearing for which, at one time, we were so angrily arraigned by the smooth south of Europe. That facile obsequiousness which attracts the inconsiderate in Belgians, Frenchmen, and Italians, is too generally a mixed product from impudence and insincerity. Want of principle and want of moral sensibility compose the original *fundus* of

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1840–1841. *Collected Writings*, Vol. X.

southern manners ; and the natural product, in a specious hollowness of demeanour, has been afterwards propagated by imitation through innumerable people who may have partaken less deeply, or not at all, in the original moral qualities that have moulded such a manner.

2. Great faults, therefore — such is my inference — may grow out of great virtues in excess. And this consideration should make us cautious even towards an enemy ; much more when approaching so holy a question as the merits of our maternal land. Else, and supposing that a strange nation had been concerned in our judgment, we should declare ourselves mortified and humiliated by three expressions of the British character, too public to have escaped the notice of Europe. First, we writhe with shame when we hear of semi-delirious lords and ladies, sometimes theatrically costumed in caftans and turbans — Lord Byrons, for instance, and Lady Hester Stanhopes — proclaiming to the whole world, as the law of their households, that all nations and languages are free to enter their gates, with one sole exception directed against their British compatriots ; that is to say, abjuring by sound of trumpet the very land through which only they themselves have risen into consideration ; spurning those for countrymen “without whom” (as M. Gourville had the boldness to tell Charles II) — “without whom, by G—, sir, you yourself are nothing.” We all know who *they* are that have done this thing : we *may* know, if we inquire, how many conceited coxcombs are at this moment acting upon that precedent ; in which, we scruple not to avow, are contained funds for everlasting satire more crying than any which Juvenal found in the worst days of Rome. And we may ask calmly, Would not death, judicial death, have visited such an act amongst the ancient republics ? Next, but with

that indulgence which belongs to an infirmity rather than an error of the will, we feel ashamed for the obstinate obtuseness of our country in regard to one and the most effective of the Fine Arts. It will be understood that we speak of Music. In Painting and in Sculpture it is now past disputing that, if we are destined to inferiority at all, it is an inferiority only to the Italians of the fifteenth century — an inferiority which, if it were even sure to be permanent, we share with all the other malicious nations around us. On that head we are safe. And in the most majestic of the Fine Arts,—in Poetry,—we have a clear and vast pre-eminence as regards all nations. No nation but ourselves has equally succeeded in both forms of the higher poetry, epic and tragic; whilst of meditative or philosophic poetry (Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's), to say nothing of lyric — we may affirm what Quintilian says justly of Roman satire: "*tota quidem nostra est.*"<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, in every mode of composition through which the impassioned mind speaks a nation has excelled its rivals, we cannot be allowed to suppose any general defect of sensibility as a cause of obtuseness with regard to music. So little, however, is the grandeur of this divine art suspected amongst us generally that a man will write an essay deliberately for the purpose of putting on record his own preference of a song to the most elaborate music of Mozart: he will glory in his shame, and, though speaking in the character of one seemingly confessing to a weakness, will evidently view himself in the light of a candid man, laying bare a state of feeling which is natural and sound, opposed to a class of false pretenders who, whilst servile to rules of artists, in reality contradict their own musical instincts, and feel little or nothing of what they profess. Strange that

<sup>1</sup> [All is indeed ours.]

even the analogy of other arts should not open his eyes to the delusion he is encouraging! A song, an air, a tune,—that is, a short succession of notes revolving rapidly upon itself,—how could that, by possibility, offer a field of compass sufficient for the development of great musical effects? The preparation pregnant with the future; the remote correspondence; the questions, as it were, which to a deep musical sense are asked in one passage and answered in another; the iteration and ingemination of a given effect, moving through subtle variations that sometimes disguise the theme, sometimes fitfully reveal it, sometimes throw it out tumultuously to the blaze of daylight: these and ten thousand forms of self-conflicting musical passion,—what room could they find, what opening, what utterance, in so limited a field as an air or song? A hunting-box, a park-lodge, may have a forest grace and the beauty of appropriateness; but what if a man should match such a bauble against the Pantheon, or against the minsters of York and Cologne? A repartee may by accident be practically effective: it has been known to crush a party scheme, and an oration of Cicero's or of Burke's could have done no more; but what judgment would match the two against each other as developments of power? Let him who finds the *maximum* of his musical gratification in a song be assured, by that one fact, that his sensibility is rude and undeveloped. Yet exactly upon this level is the ordinary state of musical feeling throughout Great Britain; and the howling wilderness of the psalmody in most parish churches of the land countersigns the statement. There is, however, accumulated in London more musical science than in any capital of the world. This, gradually diffused, will improve the feeling of the country. And, if it should fail to do so, in the worst case we have the satisfaction of

knowing, through Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and by later evidences, that, sink as we may below Italy and Germany in the sensibility to this divine art, we cannot go lower than France. Here, however, and in this cherished obtuseness as regards a pleasure so important for human life and at the head of the physico-intellectual pleasures, we find a second reason for quarrelling with the civilization of our country. At the summit of civilization in other points, she is here yet uncultivated and savage.

3. A third point is larger. Here (properly speaking) our quarrel is co-extensive with that general principle in England which tends in all things to set the matter above the manner, the substance above the external show,—a principle noble in itself, but inevitably wrong wherever the manner blends inseparably with the substance.

4. This general tendency operates in many ways: but our own immediate purpose is concerned with it only so far as it operates upon Style. In no country upon earth, were it possible to carry such a maxim into practical effect, is it a more determinate tendency of the national mind to value the *matter* of a book not only as paramount to the *manner*, but even as distinct from it, and as capable of a separate insulation. What first gave a shock to such a tendency must have been the unwilling and mysterious sense that in some cases the matter and the manner were so inextricably interwoven as not to admit of this coarse bisection. The one was embedded, entangled, and interfused through the other, in a way which bade defiance to such gross mechanical separations. But the tendency to view the two elements as in a separate relation still predominates, and, as a consequence, the tendency to undervalue the accomplishment of style. Do we mean that the English, as a literary nation, are practically less sensible of the

effects of a beautiful style? Not at all. Nobody can be insensible to these effects. And, upon a known fact of history,—viz. the *exclusive* cultivation of popular oratory in England throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,—we might presume a peculiar and exalted sense of style amongst ourselves. Until the French Revolution no nation of Christendom except England had any practical experience of popular rhetoric: any deliberative eloquence, for instance; any forensic eloquence that was made public; any democratic eloquence of the hustings; or any form whatever of public rhetoric beyond that of the pulpit. Through two centuries at least, no nation could have been so constantly reminded of the powers for good and evil which belong to style. Often it must have happened, to the mortification or joy of multitudes, that one man out of windy nothings has constructed an overwhelming appeal to the passions of his hearers, while another has thrown away the weightiest cause by his manner of treating it. Neither let it be said that this might not arise from differences of style, but because the triumphant demagogue made use of fictions, and therefore that his triumph was still obtained by means of his matter, however hollow that matter might have proved upon investigation. That case, also, is a possible case; but often enough two orators have relied upon the same identical matter—the facts, for instance, of the slave-trade—and one has turned this to such good account by his arrangements, by his modes of vivifying dry statements, by his arts of illustration, by his science of connecting things with human feeling, that he has left his hearers in convulsions of passion; whilst the other shall have used every tittle of the same matter without eliciting one scintillation of sympathy, without leaving behind one distinct impression in the memory or planting one murmur in the heart.

5. In proportion, therefore, as the English people have been placed for two centuries and a quarter (*i.e.* since the latter decennium of James the First's reign) under a constant experience of popular eloquence thrown into all channels of social life, they must have had peculiar occasion to feel the effects of style. But to feel is not to feel consciously. Many a man is charmed by one cause who ascribes the effect to another. Many a man is fascinated by the artifices of composition who fancies that it is the subject which has operated so potently. And even for the subtlest of philosophers who keeps in mind the interpenetration of the style and the matter it would be as difficult to distribute the true proportions of their joint action as, with regard to the earliest rays of the dawn, it would be to say how much of the beauty lay in the heavenly light which chased away the darkness, how much in the rosy colour which that light entangled.

6. Easily, therefore, it may have happened that, under the constant action and practical effects of style, a nation may have failed to notice the cause *as* the cause. And, besides the disturbing forces which mislead the judgment of the auditor in such a case, there are other disturbing forces which modify the practice of the speaker. That is good rhetoric for the hustings which is bad for a book. Even for the highest forms of popular eloquence the laws of style vary much from the general standard. In the senate, and for the same reason in a newspaper, it is a virtue to reiterate your meaning: tautology becomes a merit: variation of the words, with a substantial identity of the sense and dilution of the truth, is oftentimes a necessity. A man who should content himself with a single condensed enunciation of a perplexed doctrine would be a madman and a *felo-de-se*<sup>1</sup> as respected his reliance upon that doctrine.

Like boys who are throwing the sun's rays into the eyes of a mob by means of a mirror, you must shift your lights and vibrate your reflections at every possible angle, if you would agitate the popular mind extensively. Every mode of intellectual communication has its separate strength and separate weakness,—its peculiar embarrassments, compensated by peculiar resources. It is the advantage of a book that you can return to the past page if anything in the present depends upon it. But, return being impossible in the case of a spoken harangue, where each sentence perishes as it is born, both the speaker and the hearer become aware of a mutual interest in a much looser style, and a perpetual dispensation from the severities of abstract discussion. It is for the benefit of both that the weightier propositions should be detained before the eye a good deal longer than the chastity of taste or the austerity of logic would tolerate in a book. Time must be given for the intellect to eddy about a truth, and to appropriate its bearings. There is a sort of previous lubrication, such as the boa-constrictor applies to any subject of digestion, which is requisite to familiarize the mind with a startling or a complex novelty. And this is obtained for the intellect by varying the modes of presenting it,—now putting it directly before the eye, now obliquely, now in an abstract shape, now in the concrete; all which, being the proper technical discipline for dealing with such cases, ought no longer to be viewed as a licentious mode of style, but as the just style in respect of those licentious circumstances. And the true art for such popular display is to contrive the best forms for appearing to say something new when in reality you are but echoing yourself; to break up massy chords into running variations; and to mask, by slight differences in the manner, a virtual identity in the substance.

7. We have been illustrating a twofold neutralizing effect applied to the advantages otherwise enjoyed by the English people for appreciating the forms of style. What was it that made the populace of Athens and of Rome so sensible to the force of rhetoric and to the magic of language? It was the habit of hearing these two great engines daily worked for purposes interesting to themselves as citizens, and sufficiently intelligible to command their willing attention. The English amongst modern nations have had the same advantages, allowance being made for the much less intense concentration of the audience. In the ancient republics it was always the same city, and, therefore, the same audience, except in so far as it was spread through many generations. This has been otherwise in England; and yet, by newspaper reports, any great effect in one assize town, or electoral town, has been propagated to the rest of the empire, through the eighteenth and the present century. But all this, and the continual exemplification of style as a great agency for democratic effect, have not availed to win a sufficient *practical* respect in England for the arts of composition as essential to authorship. And the reason is because, in the first place, from the intertexture of style and matter, from the *impossibility that the one should affect them otherwise than in connexion with the other*, it has been natural for an audience to charge on the superior agent what often belonged to the lower. This in the first place; and, secondly, because, *the modes of style appropriate to popular eloquence being essentially different from those of written composition*, any possible experience on the hustings, or in the senate, would *pro tanto* tend rather to disqualify the mind for appreciating the more chaste and more elaborate qualities of style fitted for books; and thus a real advantage of the

English in one direction has been neutralized by two causes in another.

8. Generally and ultimately it is certain that our British disregard or inadequate appreciation of style, though a very lamentable fault, has had its origin in the manliness of the British character ; in the sincerity and directness of the British taste ; in the principle of "*esse quam videri*,"<sup>1</sup> which might be taken as the key to much in our manner, much in the philosophy of our lives ; and, finally, has had some part of its origin in that same love for the practical and the tangible which has so memorably governed the course of our higher speculations from Bacon to Newton. But, whatever may have been the origin of this most faulty habit, whatever mixed causes now support it, beyond all question it is that such a habit of disregard or of slight regard applied to all the arts of composition does exist in the most painful extent, and is detected by a practised eye in every page of almost every book that is published.

9. If you could look anywhere with a right to expect continual illustrations of what is good in the manifold qualities of style, it should reasonably be amongst our professional authors ; but, as a body, they are distinguished by the most absolute carelessness in this respect. Whether in the choice of words and idioms, or in the construction of their sentences, it is not possible to conceive the principle of lazy indifference carried to a more revolting extremity. Proof lies before you, spread out upon every page, that no excess of awkwardness, or of inelegance, or of unrhythymical cadence, is so rated in the tariff of faults as to balance in the writer's estimate the trouble of remoulding a clause, of interpolating a phrase, or even of striking the pen through a superfluous word. In our own experience it has happened

<sup>1</sup> [To be is better than to seem.]

that we have known an author so laudably fastidious in this subtle art as to have recast one chapter of a series no less than seventeen times : so difficult was the ideal or model of excellence which he kept before his mind ; so indefatigable was his labour for mounting to the level of that ideal. Whereas, on the other hand, with regard to a large majority of the writers now carrying forward the literature of the country from the last generation to the next, the evidence is perpetual not so much that they rest satisfied with their own random preconceptions of each clause or sentence as that they never trouble themselves to form any such preconceptions. Whatever words tumble out under the blindest accidents of the moment, those are the words retained ; whatever sweep is impressed by chance upon the motion of a period, that is the arrangement ratified. To fancy that men thus determinately careless as to the grosser elements of style would pause to survey distant proportions, or to adjust any more delicate symmetries of good composition, would be visionary. As to the links of connexion, the transitions, and the many other functions of logic in good writing, things are come to such a pass that what was held true of Rome in two separate ages by two great rhetoricians, and of Constantinople in an age long posterior, may now be affirmed of England : the idiom of our language, the mother tongue, survives only amongst our women and children ; not, Heaven knows, amongst our women who write books — they are often painfully conspicuous for all that disfigures authorship — but amongst well-educated women not professionally given to literature. Cicero and Quintilian, each for his own generation, ascribed something of the same pre-eminence to the noble matrons of Rome ; and more than one writer of the Lower Empire has recorded of Byzantium that in the nurseries of that city was found the last home

for the purity of the ancient Greek. No doubt it might have been found also amongst the innumerable mob of that haughty metropolis, but stained with corruptions and vulgar abbreviations ; or, wherever it might lurk, assuredly it was not amongst the noble, the officials, or the courtiers, — else it was impossible that such a master of affectation as Nicetas Choniates, for instance, should have found toleration. But the rationale of this matter lies in a small compass : why are the local names, whenever they have resulted from the general good sense of a country, faithful to the local truth, grave, and unaffected ? Simply because they are not inventions of any active faculty, but mere passive depositions from a real impression upon the mind. On the other hand, wherever there is an ambitious principle set in motion for name-inventing, there it is sure to terminate in something monstrous and fanciful. Women offend in such cases even more than men, because more of sentiment or romance will mingle with the names they impose. Sailors again err in an opposite spirit ; there is no affectation in their names, but there is too painful an effort after ludicrous allusions to the gravities of their native land — “ Big Wig Island,” or “ the Bishop and his Clerks ” — or the name becomes a memento of real incidents, but too casual and personal to merit this lasting record of a name, such as *Point Farewell*, or *Cape Turn-again*. This fault applies to many of the Yankee<sup>1</sup> names, and to many more in the southern and western States of North America, where the earliest population has usually been of a less religious char-

<sup>1</sup> “ *Yankee names* ” :— Foreigners in America subject themselves to a perpetual misinterpretation by misapplying this term. “ *Yankee*,” in the American use, does not mean a citizen of the United States as opposed to a foreigner, but a citizen of the Northern New England States (Massachusetts, Connecticut, etc.) opposed to a Virginian, a Kentuckian, etc. — DE Q.

acter ; and most of all it applies to the names of the back settlements. These people live under influences the most opposite to those of false refinement : coarse necessities, elementary features of peril or embarrassment, primary aspects of savage nature, compose the scenery of their thoughts, and these are reflected by their names. *Dismal Swamp* expresses a condition of unreclaimed nature, which must disappear with growing civilization. *Big Bone Lick* tells a tale of cruelty that cannot often be repeated. Buffaloes, like all cattle, derive medicinal benefit from salt ; they come in droves for a thousand miles to lick the masses of rock salt. The new settlers, observing this, lie in ambush to surprise them : 25,000 noble animals in one instance were massacred for their hides. In the following year the usual crowds advanced, but the first who snuffed the tainted air wheeled round, bellowed, and " recoiled " far into his native woods. Meantime the large bones remain to attest the extent of the merciless massacre. Here, as in all cases, there is a truth expressed, but again too casual and special. Besides that, from contempt of elegance, or from defect of art, the names resemble the seafaring nomenclature in being too rudely compounded.

**10.** As with the imposition of names, so with the use of the existing language, most classes stand between the pressure of two extremes : of coarseness, of carelessness, of imperfect art, on the one hand ; of spurious refinement and fantastic ambition upon the other. Authors have always been a dangerous class for any language. Amongst the myriads who are prompted to authorship by the coarse love of reputation, or by the nobler craving for sympathy, there will always be thousands seeking distinction through novelties of diction. Hopeless of any audience through mere weight of matter, they will turn for their last resource

to such tricks of innovation as they can bring to bear upon language. What care they for purity or simplicity of diction, if at any cost of either they can win a special attention to themselves? Now, the great body of women are under no such unhappy bias. If they happen to move in polished circles, or have received a tolerable education, they will speak their native language of necessity with truth and simplicity. And, supposing them not to be professional writers (as so small a proportion *can* be, even in France or England), there is always something in the situation of women which secures a fidelity to the idiom. From the greater excitability of females, and the superior vivacity of their feelings, they will be liable to far more irritations from wounded sensibilities. It is for such occasions chiefly that they seek to be effective in their language. Now, there is not in the world so certain a guarantee for pure idiomatic diction, without tricks or affectation, as a case of genuine excitement. Real situations are always pledges of a real natural language. It is in counterfeit passion, in the mimical situations of novels, or in poems that are efforts of ingenuity and no ebullitions of absolute unsimulated feeling, that female writers endeavour to sustain their own jaded sensibility, or to reinforce the languishing interest of their readers by extravagances of language. No woman in this world, under a movement of resentment from a false accusation, or from jealousy, or from confidence betrayed, ever was at leisure to practise vagaries of caprice in the management of her mother tongue: strength of real feeling shuts out all temptation to the affectation of false feeling.

**11.** Hence the purity of the female Byzantine Greek. Such caprices as they might have took some other course, and found some other vent than through their mother

tongue. Hence, also, the purity of female English. Would you desire at this day to read our noble language in its native beauty, picturesque from idiomatic propriety, racy in its phraseology, delicate yet sinewy in its composition, steal the mail-bags, and break open all the letters in female handwriting. Three out of four will have been written by that class of women who have the most leisure and the most interest in a correspondence by the post: that class who combine more of intelligence, cultivation, and of thoughtfulness, than any other in Europe—the class of unmarried women above twenty-five—an increasing class;<sup>1</sup> women who, from mere dignity of character, have renounced all prospects of conjugal and parental life, rather than descend into habits unsuitable to their birth. Women capable of such sacrifices, and marked by such strength of mind, may be expected to think with deep feeling, and to express themselves (unless where they have been too much biassed by bookish connexions) with natural grace. Not impossibly these same women, if required to come forward in some public character, might write ill and affectedly. They would then have their free natural movement of thought distorted into some accommodation to artificial standards, amongst which they might happen to select a bad one for imitation. But in their letters they write under the benefit of their natural advantages; not warped, on the one hand, into that constraint or awkwardness which is the inevitable effect of conscious exposure to public gaze; yet, on the other, not left to vacancy or

<sup>1</sup> “*An increasing class*” :—But not in France. It is a most remarkable moral phenomenon in the social condition of that nation, and one which speaks a volume as to the lower tone of female dignity, that unmarried women at the age which amongst us obtains the insulting name of *old maids* are almost unknown. What shocking sacrifices of sexual honour does this one fact argue! — DE Q.

the chills of apathy, but sustained by some deep sympathy between themselves and their correspondents.

12. So far as concerns idiomatic English, we are satisfied, from the many beautiful female letters which we have heard upon chance occasions from every quarter of the empire, that they, the educated women of Great Britain — above all, the interesting class of women unmarried upon scruples of sexual honour — and also (as in Constantinople of old) the nurseries of Great Britain, — are the true and best depositaries of the old mother idiom. But we must not forget that, though this is another term for what is good in English when we are talking of a human and a popular interest, there is a separate use of the language, as in the higher forms of history or philosophy, which ought *not* to be idiomatic. As respects that which *is*, it is remarkable that the same orders cling to the ancient purity of diction amongst ourselves who did so in Pagan Rome: viz. *women*, for the reasons just noticed, *and people of rank*. So much has this been the tendency in England that we know a person of great powers, but who has in all things a one-sided taste, and is so much a lover of idiomatic English as to endure none else, who professes to read no writer since Lord Chesterfield. It is certain that this accomplished nobleman, who has been most unjustly treated from his unfortunate collision with a national favourite, and in part also from the laxity of his moral principles, — where, however, he spoke worse than he thought, — wrote with the ease and careless grace of a high-bred gentleman. But his style is not peculiar: it has always been the style of his order. After making the proper allowance for the continual new infusions into our peerage from the bookish class of lawyers, and for some modifications derived from the learned class of spiritual peers, the tone of Lord Chesterfield has always

been the tone of our old aristocracy,—a tone of elegance and propriety, above all things free from the stiffness of pedantry or academic rigour, and obeying Cæsar's rule of shunning *tanquam scopulum*<sup>1</sup> any *insolens verbum*.<sup>2</sup> It is, indeed, through this channel that the solicitudes of our British nobility have always flowed: other qualities might come and go according to the temperament of the individual; but what in all generations constituted an object of horror for that class was bookish precision and professional peculiarity. From the free popular form of our great public schools, to which nine out of ten amongst our old nobility resorted, it happened unavoidably that they were not equally clear of popular vulgarities; indeed, from another cause, *that* could not have been avoided: for it is remarkable that a connexion, as close as through an umbilical cord, has always been maintained between the very highest orders of our aristocracy and the lowest of our democracy, by means of nurses. The nurses and immediate personal attendants of all classes come from the same sources, most commonly from the peasantry of the land; they import into all families alike, into the highest and lowest, the coarsest expressions from the vernacular language of anger and contempt. Whence, for example, it was that about five or six years ago, when a new novel circulated in London, with a private understanding that it was a juvenile effort from two very young ladies, daughters of a ducal house, nobody who reflected at all could feel much surprise that one of the characters should express her self-esteem by the popular phrase that she did not “think small beer of herself.” Naturally, papa, the duke, had not so much modified the diction of the two young ladies as Nurse Bridget. Equally in its faults and its merits, the language of high life has

<sup>1</sup> [As (he would) a rock.]

<sup>2</sup> [Immoderate word.]

always tended to simplicity and the vernacular ideal, recoiling from every mode of bookishness. And in this, as in so many other instances, it is singular to note the close resemblance between polished England and polished Rome. Augustus Cæsar was so little able to enter into any artificial forms or tortuous obscurities of ambitious rhetoric that he could not so much as understand them. Even the old antique forms of language, where it happened that they had become obsolete, were to him disgusting. Indeed, as regarded the choice and colouring of diction, Augustus was much of a blockhead : a truth which we utter boldly, now that none of his thirty legions can get at us. And probably the main bond of connexion between himself and Horace was their common and excessive hatred of obscurity ; from which quality, indeed, the very intellectual defects of both, equally with their good taste, alienated them to intensity.

13. The pure racy idiom of colloquial or household English, we have insisted, must be looked for in the circles of well-educated women not too closely connected with books. It is certain that books, in any language, will tend to encourage a diction too remote from the style of spoken idiom ; whilst the greater solemnity and the more ceremonial costume of regular literature must often demand such a non-idiomatic diction upon mere principles of good taste. But why is it that in our day literature has taken so determinate a swing towards this professional language of books as to justify some fears that the other extreme of the free colloquial idiom will perish as a living dialect ? The apparent cause lies in a phenomenon of modern life which on other accounts also is entitled to anxious consideration. It is in newspapers that we must look for the main reading of this generation ; and in newspapers, there-

fore, we must seek for the causes operating upon the style of the age. Seventy years ago this tendency in political journals to usurp upon the practice of books, and to mould the style of writers, was noticed by a most acute observer, himself one of the most brilliant writers in the class of satiric sketchers and personal historians that any nation has produced. Already before 1770 the late Lord Orford, then simply Horace Walpole, was in the habit of saying to any man who consulted him on the cultivation of style, — “Style is it that you want? Oh, go and look into the newspapers for a style.” This was said half contemptuously and half seriously. But the evil has now become overwhelming. One single number of a London morning paper,— which in half a century has expanded from the size of a dinner napkin to that of a breakfast tablecloth, from that to a carpet, and will soon be forced, by the expansions of public business, into something resembling the mainsail of a frigate,— already is equal in printed matter to a very large octavo volume. Every old woman in the nation now reads daily a vast miscellany in one volume royal octavo. The evil of this, as regards the quality of knowledge communicated, admits of no remedy. Public business, in its whole unwieldy compass, must always form the subject of these daily chronicles. Nor is there much room to expect any change in the style. The evil effect of this upon the style of the age may be reduced to two forms. Formerly the natural impulse of every man was spontaneously to use the language of life; the language of books was a secondary attainment, not made without effort. Now, on the contrary, the daily composers of newspapers have so long dealt in the professional idiom of books as to have brought it home to every reader in the nation who does not violently resist it by some domestic

advantages. Time was, within our own remembrance that, if you should have heard, in passing along the street, from any old apple-woman such a phrase as "I will *avail myself* of your kindness," forthwith you would have shied like a skittish horse; you would have run away in as much terror as any old Roman upon those occasions when *bos loquebatur*.<sup>1</sup> At present you swallow such marvels as matters of course. The whole artificial dialect of books has come into play as the dialect of ordinary life. This is one form of the evil impressed upon our style by journalism: a dire monotony of bookish idiom has encrusted and stiffened all native freedom of expression, like some scaly leprosy or elephantiasis, barking and hide-binding the fine natural pulses of the elastic flesh. Another and almost a worse evil has established itself in the prevailing structure of sentences. Every man who has had any experience in writing knows how natural it is for hurry and fulness of matter to discharge itself by vast sentences, involving clause within clause *ad infinitum*; how difficult it is, and how much a work of art, to break up this huge fasciculus of cycle and epicycle into a graceful succession of sentences, long intermingled with short, each modifying the other, and arising musically by links of spontaneous connexion. Now, the plethoric form of period, this monster model of sentence, bloated with decomplex intercalations, and exactly repeating the form of syntax which distinguishes an act of Parliament, is the prevailing model in newspaper eloquence. Crude undigested masses of suggestion, furnishing rather raw materials for composition and jottings for the memory than any formal developments of the ideas, describe the quality of writing which must prevail in journalism: not from defect of talents,—

<sup>1</sup> [The ox spoke.]

which are at this day of that superior class which may be presumed from the superior importance of the function itself,— but from the necessities of hurry and of instant compliance with an instant emergency, granting no possibility for revision or opening for amended thought, which are evils attached to the flying velocities of public business.

14. As to structure of sentence and the periodic involution, *that* scarcely admits of being exemplified in the conversation of those who do not write. But the choice of phraseology is naturally and easily echoed in the colloquial forms of those who surrender themselves to such an influence. To mark in what degree this contagion of bookishness has spread, and how deeply it has moulded the habits of expression in classes naturally the least likely to have been reached by a revolution so artificial in its character, we will report a single record from the memorials of our own experience. Some eight years ago, we had occasion to look for lodgings in a newly-built suburb of London to the south of the Thames. The mistress of the house (with respect to whom we have nothing to report more than that she was in the worst sense a vulgar woman: that is, not merely a low-bred person—so much might have been expected from her occupation—but morally vulgar by the evidence of her own complex precautions against fraud, reasonable enough in so dangerous a capital, but not calling for the very ostentatious display of them which she obtruded upon us) was in regular training, it appeared, as a student of newspapers. She had no children; the newspapers were her children. There lay her studies; that branch of learning constituted her occupation from morning to night; and the following were amongst the words which she—this semi-barbarian—poured from her cornucopia during the very few minutes of our interview; which

interview was brought to an abrupt issue by mere nervous agitation upon our part. The words, as noted down within an hour of the occasion, and after allowing a fair time for our recovery, were these:—first, “category”; secondly, “predicament” (where, by the way, from the twofold iteration of the idea—Greek and Roman—it appears that the old lady was “twice armed”); thirdly, “individuality”; fourthly, “procrastination”; fifthly, “speaking diplomatically, would not wish to *commit* herself,”—who knew but that “inadvertently she might even *compromise* both herself and her husband”? sixthly, “would spontaneously adapt the several modes of domestication to the reciprocal interests,” etc.; and, finally—(which word it was that settled us: we heard it as we reached the topmost stair on the second floor, and, without further struggle against our instincts, round we wheeled, rushed down forty-five stairs, and exploded from the house with a fury causing us to impinge against an obese or protuberant gentleman, and calling for mutual explanations: a result which nothing could account for but a steel bow, or mustachios on the lip of an elderly woman: meantime the fatal word was),—seventhly, “anteriorly.” Concerning which word we solemnly depose and make affidavit that neither from man, woman, nor book, had we ever heard it before this unique rencontre with this abominable woman on the staircase. The occasion which furnished the excuse for such a word was this:—From the staircase-window we saw a large shed in the rear of the house; apprehending some nuisance of “manufacturing industry” in our neighbourhood,—“What’s that?” we demanded. Mark the answer: “A shed; that’s what it is; *videlicet* a shed; and anteriorly to the existing shed there was—;” *what* there was posterity must consent to have wrapt in darkness, for there came on our nervous

seizure, which intercepted further communication. But observe, as a point which took away any gleam of consolation from the case, the total absence of all *malaprop* picturesqueness that might have defeated its deadly action upon the nervous system. No; it is due to the integrity of *her* disease, and to the completeness of *our* suffering, that we should attest the unimpeachable correctness of her words, and of the syntax by which she connected them.

15. Now, if we could suppose the case that the old household idiom of the land were generally so extinguished amongst us as it was in this particular instance; if we could imagine, as a *universal* result of journalism, that a coarse unlettered woman, having occasion to say, "this or that stood in such a place before the present shed," should take as a natural or current formula "anteriorly to the existing shed there stood," etc., what would be the final effect upon our literature? Pedantry, though it were unconscious pedantry, once steadily diffused through a nation as to the very moulds of its thinking, and the general tendencies of its expression, could not but stiffen the natural graces of composition, and weave fetters about the free movement of human thought. This would interfere as effectually with our power of enjoying much that is excellent in our past literature as it would with our future powers of producing. And such an agency has been too long at work amongst us not to have already accomplished some part of these separate evils. Amongst women of education, as we have argued above, standing aloof from literature, and less uniformly drawing their intellectual sustenance from newspapers, the deadening effects have been partially counteracted. Here and there, amongst individuals alive to the particular evils of the age, and watching the very set of the current, there may have been even

a more systematic counteraction applied to the mischief. But the great evil in such cases is this, that we cannot see the extent of the changes wrought or being wrought, from having ourselves partaken in them. *Tempora mutantur*;<sup>1</sup> and naturally, if we could review them with the neutral eye of a stranger, it would be impossible for us not to see the extent of those changes. But our eye is *not* neutral; we also have partaken in the changes; *nos et mutamur in ipsis*.<sup>1</sup> And this fact disturbs the power of appreciating those changes. Every one of us would have felt, sixty years ago, that the general tone and colouring of a style was stiff, bookish, pedantic, which, from the habituation of our organs, we now feel to be natural and within the privilege of learned art. Direct objective qualities it is always by comparison easy to measure; but the difficulty commences when we have to combine with this outer measurement of the object another corresponding measurement of the subjective or inner qualities by which we apply the measure; that is, when besides the objects projected to a distance from the spectator, we have to allow for variations or disturbances in the very eye which surveys them. The eye cannot see itself; we cannot project from ourselves, and contemplate as an object, our own contemplating faculty, or appreciate our own appreciating power. Biasses, therefore, or gradual warpings, that have occurred in our critical faculty as applied to style, we cannot allow for: and these biasses will unconsciously mask to our perceptions an amount of change in the quality of popular style such as we could not easily credit.

16. Separately from this change for the worse in the drooping idiomatic freshness of our diction, which is a change that has been going on for a century, the other

<sup>1</sup> [The times are changing; and we change with them.]

characteristic defect of this age lies in the tumid and tumultuary structure of our sentences. The one change has partly grown out of the other. Ever since a more bookish air was impressed upon composition without much effort by the Latinized and artificial phraseology, by forms of expression consecrated to books, and by "long-tailed words in *osity* and *ation*,"—either because writers felt that already, in this one act of preference shown to the artificial vocabulary, they had done enough to establish a differential character of regular composition, and on that consideration thought themselves entitled to neglect the combination of their words into sentences or periods; or because there is a real natural sympathy between the Latin phraseology and a Latin structure of sentence,—certain it is and remarkable that our popular style, in the common limited sense of arrangement applied to words or the syntax of sentences, has laboured with two faults that might have been thought incompatible: it has been artificial, by artifices peculiarly adapted to the powers of the Latin language, and yet at the very same time careless and disordinate. There is a strong idea expressed by the Latin word *inconditus*, *disorganized*, or rather *unorganized*. Now, in spite of its artificial bias, that is the very epithet which will best characterize our newspaper style. To be viewed as susceptible of organization, such periods must already be elaborate and artificial; to be viewed as not having received it, such periods must be hyperbolically careless.

17. But perhaps the very best illustration of all this will be found in putting the case of English style into close juxtaposition with the style of the French and Germans, our only very important neighbours. As leaders of civilization, as *powers* in an intellectual sense, there are but three

nations in Europe—England, Germany, France. As to Spain and Italy, outlying extremities, they are not moving bodies; they rest upon the past. Russia and North America are the two bulwarks of Christendom east and west. But the three powers *at the centre* are in all senses the motive forces of civilization. In all things they have the initiation, and they preside.

18. By this comparison we shall have the advantage of doing what the French express by *s'orienter*, the Germans by *sich orientiren*. Learning one of our bearings on the compass, we shall be able to deduce the rest, and we shall be able to conjecture our valuation as respects the art by finding our place amongst the artists.

19. With respect to French style, we can imagine the astonishment of an English author practised in composition, and with no previous knowledge of French literature, who should first find himself ranging freely amongst a French library. That particular fault of style which in English books is all but universal absolutely has not an existence in the French. Speaking rigorously and to the very letter of the case, we, upon a large experience in French literature, affirm that it would be nearly impossible (perhaps strictly so) to cite an instance of that cumbrous and unwieldy style which disfigures English composition so extensively. Enough could not be adduced to satisfy the purpose of illustration. And, to make a Frenchman sensible of the fault as a possibility, you must appeal to some *translated* model.

20. But why? The cause of this national immunity from a fault so common everywhere else, and so natural when we look into the producing occasions, is as much entitled to our notice as the immunity itself. The fault is inevitable, as one might fancy, to two conditions of mind:

hurry in the first place ; want of art in the second. The French must be liable to these disadvantages as much as their neighbours ; by what magic is it that they evade them or neutralize them in the result ? The secret lies here : beyond all nations, by constitutional vivacity, the French are a nation of talkers, and the model of their sentences is moulded by that fact. Conversation, which is a luxury for other nations, is for them a necessity ; by the very law of their peculiar intellect and of its social training they are colloquial. Hence it happens that there are no such people endured or ever heard of in France as *alloquial* wits,—people who talk *to* but not *with* a circle : the very finest of their *beaux esprits* must submit to the equities of conversation, and would be crushed summarily as monsters if they were to seek a selfish mode of display or a privilege of lecturing any audience of a *salon* who had met for purposes of *social* pleasure. “*De Monologue*,” as Madame de Staël, in her broken English, described this mode of display when speaking of Coleridge, is so far from being tolerated in France as an accomplishment that it is not even understood as a disease. This kind of what may be called irresponsible talk, when a man runs on *perpetuo tenore*,<sup>1</sup> not accountable for any opinion to his auditors, open to no contradiction, liable to no competition, has sometimes procured for a man in England the affix of *River* to his name : *Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum*. In Dryden’s happy version, —

“He flows, and, as he flows, for ever will flow on.”

But that has been in cases where the talking impulse was sustained by mere vivacity of animal spirits, without knowledge to support it, and liable to the full weight of Arch-

<sup>1</sup> [In endless course.]

bishop Huet's sarcasm, that it was a diarrhoea of garrulity, a *fluxe de bouche*. But in cases like that of Coleridge, where the solitary display, if selfish, is still dignified by a pomp of knowledge, and a knowledge which you feel to have been fused and combined by the genial circumstances of the speaker's position in the centre of an admiring circle, we English do still recognize the *métier* of a professional talker as a privileged mode of social display. People are asked to come and hear such a performer, as you form a select party to hear Thalberg or Paganini. The thing is understood at least with us; right or wrong there is an understanding amongst the company that you are not to interrupt the great man of the night. You may prompt him by a question; you may set him in motion; but to begin arguing against him would be felt as not less unseasonable than to insist on whistling Jim Crow during the *bravuras* and *tours de force* of great musical artists.

21. In France, therefore, from the intense adaptation of the national mind to real colloquial intercourse, for which reciprocation is indispensable, the form of sentence in use is adjusted to that primary condition; brief, terse, simple; shaped to avoid misunderstanding, and to meet the impatience of those who are waiting for their turn. People who write rapidly everywhere write as they talk; it is impossible to do otherwise. Taking a pen into his hand, a man frames his periods exactly as he would do if addressing a companion. So far the Englishman and the Frenchman are upon the same level. Suppose them, therefore, both preparing to speak: an Englishman in such a situation has no urgent motive for turning his thoughts to any other object than the prevailing one of the moment, viz. how best to convey his meaning. That object weighs also with the Frenchman; but he has a previous, a paramount, object to

watch—the necessity of avoiding *des longueurs*.<sup>1</sup> The rights, the equities of conversation are but dimly present to the mind of the Englishman. From the mind of a Frenchman they are never absent. To an Englishman, the right of occupying the attention of the company seems to inhere in *things* rather than in persons; if the particular subject under discussion should happen to be a grave one, then, in right of *that*, and not by any right of his own, a speaker will seem to an Englishman invested with the privilege of drawing largely upon the attention of a company. But to a Frenchman this right of participation in the talk is a *personal* right, which cannot be set aside by any possible claims in the subject; it passes by necessity to and fro, backwards and forwards, between the several persons who are present; and, as in the games of battledore and shuttlecock, or of "hunt the slipper," the momentary subject of interest never can settle or linger for any length of time in any one individual without violating the rules of the sport, or suspending its movement. Inevitably, therefore, the structure of sentence must for ever be adapted to this primary function of the French national intellect, the function of communicativeness, and to the necessities (for to the French they are necessities) of social intercourse, and (speaking plainly) of interminable garrulity.

22. Hence it is that in French authors, whatever may otherwise be the differences of their minds, or the differences of their themes, uniformly we find the periods short, rapid, unelaborate: Pascal or Helvetius, Condillac or Rousseau, Montesquieu or Voltaire, Buffon or Duclos,—all alike are terse, perspicuous, brief. Even Mirabeau or Chateaubriand, so much modified by foreign intercourse, in this point adhere to their national models. Even Bos-

<sup>1</sup> [Tedium.]

suet or Bourdaloue, where the diffusiveness and amplitude of oratory might have been pleaded as a dispensation, are not more licentious in this respect than their compatriots. One rise in every sentence, one gentle descent, that is the law for French composition; even too monotonously so; and thus it happens that such a thing as a long or an involved sentence can hardly be produced from French literature, though a sultan were to offer his daughter in marriage to the man who should find it. Whereas now, amongst us English, not only is the too general tendency of our sentences towards hyperbolical length, but it will be found continually that, instead of one rise and one corresponding fall—one *arsis* and one *thesis*—there are many. Flux and reflux, swell and cadence, that is the movement for a sentence; but our modern sentences agitate us by rolling fires after the fashion of those internal earthquakes that, not content with one throe, run along spasmodically in a long succession of intermitting convulsions.

23. It is not often that a single fault can produce any vast amount of evil. But there are cases where it does; and this is one: the effect of weariness and of repulsion which may arise from this single vice of unwieldy comprehensiveness in the structure of sentences cannot better be illustrated than by a frank exposure of what often happens to ourselves, and (as we differ as to this case only by consciously noticing what all feel) must often happen to others. In the evening, when it is natural that we should feel a craving for rest, some book lies near us which is written in a style clear, tranquil, easy to follow. Just at that moment comes in the wet newspaper, dripping with the dewy freshness of its news; and even in its parliamentary memorials promising so much interest that, let them

be treated in what manner they may, merely for the subjects they are often commandingly attractive. The attraction indeed is but too potent; the interest but too exciting. Yet, after all, many times we lay aside the journal, and we acquiesce in the gentler stimulation of the book. Simply the news we may read; but the discussions, whether direct from the editor, or reported from the Parliament, we refuse or we delay. And why? It is the subject, perhaps you think; it is the great political question, too agitating by the consequences it may happen to involve. No. All this, if treated in a winning style, we could bear. It is the effort, the toil, the exertion of mind requisite to follow the discussion through endless and labyrinthine sentences; this it is that compels us to forego the journal or to lay it aside until the next morning.

**24.** Those who are not accustomed to watch the effects of composition upon the feelings, or have had little experience in voluminous reading pursued for weeks, would scarcely imagine how much of downright physical exhaustion is produced by what is technically called the *periodic* style of writing: it is not the length, the *απεραντολογία*, the paralytic flux of words,—it is not even the cumbrous involution of parts within parts,—separately considered, that bears so heavily upon the attention. It is the suspense, the holding-on of the mind until what is called the *ἀποδοσία*, or coming round of the sentence commences; this it is which wears out the faculty of attention. A sentence, for example, begins with a series of *ifs*; perhaps a dozen lines are occupied with expanding the conditions under which something is affirmed or denied: here you cannot dismiss and have done with the ideas as you go along, for as yet all is hypothetic; all is suspended in air. The conditions are not fully to be understood until you

are acquainted with the dependency; you must give a separate attention to each clause of this complex hypothesis, and yet, having done *that* by a painful effort, you have done nothing at all; for you must exercise a reacting attention through the corresponding latter section, in order to follow out its relations to all parts of the hypothesis which sustains it. In fact, under the rude yet also artificial character of newspaper style, each separate monster period is a vast arch, which, not receiving its keystone, not being locked into self-supporting cohesion, until you nearly reach its close, imposes of necessity upon the unhappy reader all the *onus* of its ponderous weight through the main process of its construction. The continued repetition of so Atlantean an effort soon overwhelms your patience, and establishes at length that habitual feeling which causes you to shrink from the speculations of journalists, or (which is more likely) to adopt a worse habit than absolute neglect, which we shall notice immediately.

25. Meantime, as we have compared ourselves on this important point with the French, let us now complete our promise by noticing our relation in the same point to the Germans. Even on its own account, and without any view to our present purpose, the character of German prose is an object of legitimate astonishment. Whatever is bad in our own ideal of prose style, whatever is repulsive in our own practice, we see there carried to the most outrageous excess. Herod is out-Heroded, Sternhold is out-Sternholded, with a zealotry of extravagance that really seems like wilful burlesque. Lessing, Herder, Paul Richter, and Lichtenberg, with some few beside, either prompted by nature or trained upon foreign models, have avoided the besetting sin of German prose. Any man of distinguished talent, whose attention has been once called

steadily to this subject, cannot fail to avoid it. The misfortune of most writers has been that, once occupied with the interest of *things*, and overwhelmed by the embarrassments of disputed *doctrines*, they never advert to any question affecting what they view, by comparison, as a trifle. The *to docendum*, the thing to be taught, has availed to obscure or even to annihilate for their eyes every anxiety as to the mode of teaching. And, as one conspicuous example of careless style acts by its authority to create many more, we need not wonder at the results, even when they reach a point of what may be called monstrous. Among ten thousand offenders, who carry their neglect of style even to that point, we would single out Immanuel Kant. Such is the value of his philosophy in some sections, and partially it is so very capable of a lucid treatment, intelligible to the plainest man of reflective habits, that within no long interval we shall certainly see him naturalized amongst ourselves: there are particular applications of his philosophy, not contemplated by himself, for which we venture to predict that even the religious student will ultimately be thankful, when the cardinal principles have been brought under a clear light of interpretation. Attention will then be forced upon his style, and facts will come forward not credible without experimental proof. For instance, we have lying before us at this moment his *Critik der Practischen Vernunft*<sup>1</sup> in the unpirated edition of Hartknoch, the respectable publisher of all Kant's great works. The text is therefore authentic, and, being a fourth edition (Riga, 1797), must be presumed to have benefited by the author's careful revision. We have no time for search; but, on barely throwing open the book, we see a sentence at pp. 70, 71, exactly covering one whole octavo

<sup>1</sup> [Critique of Practical Reason.]

page of thirty-one lines (each line averaging forty-five to forty-eight letters). Sentences of the same caliber, some even of far larger *bore*, we have observed in this and other works of the same author. And it is not the fact taken as an occasional possibility, it is the prevailing character of his style, that we insist on as the most formidable barrier to the study of his writings, and to the progress of what will soon be acknowledged as important in his principles. A sentence is viewed by him, and by most of his countrymen, as a rude mould or elastic form admitting of expansion to any possible extent: it is laid down as a rough outline, and then by superstructure and *epi*-superstructure it is gradually reared to a giddy altitude which no eye can follow. Yielding to his natural impulse of subjoining all additions, or exceptions, or modifications, not in the shape of separate consecutive sentences, but as intercalations and stuffings of one original sentence, Kant might naturally enough have written a book from beginning to end in one vast hyperbolical sentence. We sometimes see an English Act of Parliament which does literally accomplish that end, by an artifice which in law has a purpose and a use. Instead of laying down a general proposition, which is partially false until it has received its proper restraints, the framer of the act endeavours to evade even this momentary falsehood by coupling the limitations with the very primary enunciation of the truth: *e.g.* A shall be entitled, provided always that he is under the circumstances of *e*, or *i*, or *o*, to the right of X. Thus, even a momentary compliance with the false notion of an absolute unconditional claim to X is evaded; a truth which is only a conditional truth is stated as such from the first. There is, therefore, a theoretic use. But what is the practical result? Why, that, when you attempt to read an Act of

Parliament where the exceptions, the secondary exceptions to the exceptions, the limitations and the sublimitations, descend, *seriatim*, by a vast scale of dependencies, the mind finds itself overtired; the energy of the most energetic begins to droop; and so inevitable is that result that Mr. Pitt, a minister unusually accomplished for such process by constitution of mind and by practice, publicly avowed his inability to follow so trying a conflict with technical embarrassments. He declared himself to be lost in the labyrinth of clauses: the Ariadne's clue was wanting for his final extrication: and he described his situation at the end with the simplicity natural to one who was no charlatan, and sought for no reputation by the tricks of a funambulist: "In the crowd of things excepted and counter-excepted, he really ceased to understand the main point—what it was that the law allowed, and what it was that it disallowed."

26. We might have made our readers merry with the picture of German prose; but we must not linger. It is enough to say that it offers the counterpole to the French style. Our own popular style, and (what is worse) the *tendency* of our own, is to the German extreme. To those who read German, indeed, German prose, as written by the mob of authors, presents, as in a Brobdingnagian and exaggerating mirror, the most offensive faults of our own.

27. But these faults—are they in practice so wearisome and exhausting as we have described them? Possibly not; and, where that happens to be the case, let the reader ask himself if it is not by means of an evasion worse in its effects than any fault of style could ever prove in its most overcharged form. Shrinking, through long experience, from the plethoric form of cumulation and "periodic" writ-

ing in which the journalist supports or explains his views, every man who puts a business value upon his time slips naturally into a trick of shorthand reading. It is more even by the effort and tension of mind in *holding on* than by the mere loss of time that most readers are repelled from the habit of careful reading. An evil of modern growth is met by a modern remedy. Every man gradually learns an art of catching at the leading words, and the cardinal or hinge joints of transition, which proclaim the general course of a writer's speculation. Now, it is very true, and is sure to be objected, that, where so much is certain to prove mere iteration and teasing *surplusage*, little can be lost by this or any other process of abridgment. Certainly, as regards the particular subject concerned, there may be no room to apprehend a serious injury. Not there, not in any direct interest, but in a far larger interest—indirect for the moment, but the most direct and absolute of all interests for an intellectual being,—the reader suffers a permanent debilitation. He acquires a factitious propensity; he forms an incorrigible habit of desultory reading. Now, to say of a man's knowledge, that it will be shallow, or (which is worse than shallow) will be erroneous and insecure in its foundations, is vastly to underrate the evil of such a habit: it is by reaction upon a man's faculties, it is by the effects reflected upon his judging and reasoning powers, that loose habits of reading tell eventually. And these are durable effects. Even as respects the minor purpose of information, better it is, by a thousandfold, to have read threescore of books (chosen judiciously) with severe attention than to have raced through the library of the Vatican at a newspaper pace. But, as respects the final habits acquired, habits of thinking coherently and of judging soundly, better that a man should have not read one line throughout his

life than have travelled through the journals of Europe by this random process of “reading short.”

28. Yet, by this Parthian habit of aiming at full gallop,—of taking flying shots at conspicuous marks, and, like Parthians also, directing their chance arrows whilst retreating, and revolting with horror from a direct approach to the object,—thus it is that the young and the flexible are trained amongst us under the increasing tyranny of journalism. A large part of the evil, therefore, belongs to style; for it is this which repels readers, and enforces the shorthand process of desultory reading. A large part of the evil, therefore, is of a nature to receive a remedy.

29. It is with a view to that practical part of the extensive evil that we have shaped our present notice of popular style, as made operative amongst ourselves. One single vice of periodic syntax,—a vice unknown to the literature of Greece, and, until Paterculus, even of Rome (although the language of Rome was so naturally adapted to that vice),—has with us counterbalanced all possible vices of any other order. Simply by the vast sphere of its agency for evil, in the habits of mind which it produces and supports, such a vice merits a consideration which would else be disproportionate. Yet, at the same time, it must not be forgotten that, if the most operative of all vices, after all it is but one. What are the others?

30. It is a fault, amongst many faults, of such works as we have on this subject of style, that they collect the list of qualities, good or bad, to which composition is liable, not under any principle from which they might be deduced *a priori*, so as to be assured that all had been enumerated, but by a tentative groping, a mere conjectural estimate. The word *style* has with us a twofold meaning: one, the narrow meaning, expressing the mere *synthesis onomatpon*,

the syntaxis or combination of words into sentences ; the other of far wider extent, and expressing all possible relations that can arise between thoughts and words — the total effect of a writer as derived from manner. Style may be viewed as an *organic* thing and as a *mechanic* thing. By organic, we mean that which, being acted upon, reacts, and which propagates the communicated power without loss. By mechanic, that which, being impressed with motion, cannot throw it back without loss, and therefore soon comes to an end. The human body is an elaborate system of organs ; it is sustained by organs. But the human body is exercised as a machine, and as such may be viewed in the arts of riding, dancing, leaping, etc., subject to the laws of motion and equilibrium. Now, the use of words is an organic thing, in so far as language is connected with thoughts, and modified by thoughts. It is a mechanic thing, in so far as words in combination determine or modify each other. The science of style as an organ of thought, of style in relation to the ideas and feelings, might be called the *organology* of style. The science of style considered as a machine, in which words act upon words, and through a particular grammar, might be called the *mechanology* of style. It is of little importance by what name these two functions of composition are expressed. But it is of great importance not to confound the functions : that function by which style maintains a commerce with thought, and that by which it chiefly communicates with grammar and with words. A pedant only will insist upon the names ; but the distinction in the ideas, under some name, can be neglected only by the man who is careless of logic.

**31.** We know not how far we may be ever called upon to proceed with this discussion. If it should happen that we were, an interesting field of questions would lie before us

for the first part (the organology). It would lead us over the ground trodden by the Greek and Roman rhetoricians, and over those particular questions which have arisen by the contrast between the circumstances of the ancients and our own since the origin of printing. Punctuation,<sup>1</sup> trivial as such an innovation may seem, was the product of typography; and it is interesting to trace the effects upon style even of that one slight addition to the resources of logic. Previously a man was driven to depend for his security against misunderstanding upon the pure virtue of his syntax. Miscollocation or dislocation of related words disturbed the whole sense; its least effect was to give *no* sense, — often it gave a dangerous sense. Now, punctuation was an artificial machinery for maintaining the integrity of the sense against all mistakes of the writer; and, as one consequence, it withdrew the energy of men's anxieties from the natural machinery, which lay in just and careful arrangement. Another and still greater machinery of art for the purpose of maintaining the sense, and with the effect of relaxing the care of the writer, lay in the exquisitely artificial structure of the Latin language, which by means of its

<sup>1</sup> This is a most instructive fact; and it is another fact not less instructive that lawyers in most parts of Christendom, I believe, certainly wherever they are wide-awake professionally, tolerate no punctuation. But why? Are lawyers not sensible to the luminous effect from a point happily placed? Yes, they *are* sensible; but also they are sensible of the false prejudicating effect from a punctuation managed (as too generally it is) carelessly and illogically. Here is the brief abstract of the case. All punctuation narrows the path, which is else unlimited; and (*by* narrowing it) may chance to guide the reader into the right groove amongst several that are *not* right. But also punctuation has the effect very often (and almost always has the power) of biassing and predetermining the reader to an erroneous choice of meaning. Better, therefore, no guide at all than one which is likely enough to lead astray, and which must always be suspected and mistrusted, inasmuch as very nearly always it has the *power* to lead astray.—DE Q.

terminal forms indicated the arrangement, and referred the proper predicate to the proper subject, spite of all that affectation or negligence could do to disturb the series of the logic or the succession of the syntax. Greek, of course, had the same advantage in kind, but not in degree ; and thence rose some differences which have escaped all notice of rhetoricians. Here also would properly arise the question, started by Charles Fox (but probably due originally to the conversation of some far subtler friend, such as Edmund Burke), how far the practice of footnotes—a practice purely modern in its *form*—is reconcilable with the laws of just composition, and whether in virtue, though not in form, such footnotes did not exist for the ancients, by an evasion we could point out. The question is clearly one which grows out of style in its relations to thought : how far, viz., such an excrescence as a note argues that the sentence to which it is attached has not received the benefit of a full development for the conception involved ; whether, if thrown into the furnace again and re-melted, it might not be so recast as to absorb the redundancy which had previously flowed over into a note. Under this head would fall not only all the differential questions of style and composition between us and the ancients, but also the questions of merit as fairly distributed amongst the moderns compared with each other. The French, as we recently insisted, undoubtedly possess one vast advantage over all other nations in the good taste which governs the arrangement of their sentences ; in the simplicity (a strange pretension to make for anything French) of the modulation under which their thoughts flow ; in the absence of all cumbrous involution, and in the quick succession of their periods. In reality this invaluable merit tends to an excess ; and the *style coupé* as opposed to the *style soutenu*, flippancy opposed

to solemnity, the subsultory to the continuous, these are the too frequent extremities to which the French manner betrays men. Better, however, to be flippant than by a revolting form of tumour and perplexity to lead men into habits of intellect such as result from the modern vice of English style. Still, with all its practical value, it is evident that the intellectual merits of the French style are but small. They are chiefly negative, in the first place; and, secondly, founded in the accident of their colloquial necessities. The law of conversation has prescribed the model of their sentences, and in that law there is quite as much of self-interest at work as of respect for equity. *Hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim.*<sup>1</sup> Give and take is the rule; and he who expects to be heard must condescend to listen; which necessity for both parties binds over both to be brief. Brevity so won could at any rate have little merit, and it is certain that for profound thinking it must sometimes be a hindrance. In order to be brief a man must take a short sweep of view; his range of thought cannot be extensive; and such a rule, applied to a general method of thinking, is fitted rather to aphorisms and maxims, as upon a known subject, than to any process of investigation as upon a subject yet to be fathomed. Advancing still further into the examination of style as the organ of thinking, we should find occasion to see the prodigious defects of the French in all the higher qualities of prose composition. One advantage, for a practical purpose of life, is sadly counterbalanced by numerous faults, many of which are faults of *stamina*, lying not in any corrigible defects, but in such as imply penury of thinking from radical inaptitude in the thinking faculty to connect itself with the feeling and with the creative faculty of the imagination. There are many other

<sup>1</sup> [We ask and grant this favour by turns.]

researches belonging to this subtlest of subjects, affecting both the logic and the ornaments of style, which would fall under the head of organology. But for instant practical use, though far less difficult for investigation, yet for that reason far more tangible and appreciable, would be all the suggestions proper to the other head of mechanology. Half a dozen rules for evading the most frequently recurring forms of awkwardness, of obscurity, of misproportion, and of double meaning, would do more to assist a writer in practice, laid under some necessity of hurry, than volumes of general disquisition. It makes us blush to add that even grammar is so little of a perfect attainment amongst us that, with two or three exceptions (one being Shakspere, whom some affect to consider as belonging to a semi-barbarous age) we have never seen the writer, through a circuit of prodigious reading, who has not sometimes violated the accidente or the syntax of English grammar.

32. Whatever becomes of our own possible speculations, we shall conclude with insisting on the growing necessity of style as a practical interest of daily life. Upon subjects of public concern, and in proportion to that concern, there will always be a suitable (and as letters extend a growing) competition. Other things being equal, or appearing to be equal, the determining principle for the public choice will lie in the style. Of a German book, otherwise entitled to respect, it was said, *er lässt sich nicht lesen*—it does not permit itself to be read, such and so repulsive was the style. Among ourselves this has long been true of newspapers. They do not suffer themselves to be read *in extenso*; and they are read short, with what injury to the mind we have noticed. The same style of reading, once largely practised, is applied universally. To this special

evil an improvement of style would apply a special redress. The same improvement is otherwise clamorously called for by each man's interest of competition. Public luxury, which is gradually consulted by everything else, must at length be consulted in style.

## PART II

1. It is a natural resource that whatsoever we find it difficult to investigate as a result we endeavour to follow as a growth. Failing analytically to probe its nature, historically we seek relief to our perplexities by tracing its origin. Not able to assign the elements of its theory, we endeavour to detect them in the stages of its development. Thus, for instance, when any feudal institution (be it Gothic, Norman, or Anglo-Saxon) eludes our deciphering faculty from the imperfect records of its use and operation, then we endeavour conjecturally to amend our knowledge by watching the circumstances in which that institution arose; and, from the necessities of the age, as indicated by facts which have survived, we are sometimes able to trace, through all their corresponding stages of growth, the natural succession of arrangements which such necessities would be likely to prescribe.

2. This mode of oblique research, where a more direct one is denied, we find to be the only one in our power. And, with respect to the liberal arts, it is even more true than with respect to laws or institutions, because remote ages widely separated differ much more in their pleasures than they can ever do in their social necessities. To make property safe and life sacred,—that is everywhere a primary purpose of law. But the intellectual amusements of men are so different that the very purposes and elementary functions of these amusements are different. They point to different ends as well as different means. The

Drama, for instance, in Greece, connects itself with Religion ; in other ages, Religion is the power most in resistance to the Drama. Hence, and because the elder and ruder ages are most favourable to a ceremonial and mythological religion, we find the tragedy of Greece defunct before the literary age arose. Aristotle's era may be taken as the earliest era of refinement and literary development. But Aristotle wrote his Essay on the Greek Tragedy just a century after the *chefs-d'œuvre* of that tragedy had been published.

3. If, therefore, it is sometimes requisite for the proper explanation even of a law or legal usage that we should go to its history, not looking for a sufficient key to its meaning in the mere analogies of our own social necessities, much more will that be requisite in explaining an art or a mode of intellectual pleasure. Why it was that the ancients had no landscape painting, is a question deep almost as the mystery of life, and harder of solution than all the problems of jurisprudence combined. What causes moulded the Tragedy of the ancients could hardly be guessed if we did not happen to know its history and mythologic origin. And, with respect to what is called *Style*, not so much as a sketch, as an outline, as a hint, could be furnished towards the earliest speculations upon this subject, if we should overlook the historical facts connected with its earliest development.

4. What was it that first produced into this world that celebrated thing called *Prose*? It was the bar, it was the hustings, it was the *Bema* (*το βημα*). What Gibbon and most historians of the Mussulmans have rather absurdly called the pulpit of the Caliphs should rather be called the rostrum, the Roman military *suggestus*, or Athenian *bema*. The fierce and generally illiterate Mohammedan harangued

his troops; preach he could not; he had no subject for preaching.<sup>1</sup> Now, this function of man in almost all states of society, the function of public haranguing, was, for the Pagan man who had no printing-press, more of a mere necessity through every mode of public life than it is for the modern man of Christian light; for, as to the modern

<sup>1</sup> “*No subject*” :— If he had a subject, what was it? As to the sole doctrines of Islam—the unity of God, and the mission of Mahomet as his chief prophet (*i.e.* not predictor or foreseer, but interpreter)—*that* must be presumed known to every man in a Mussulman army, since otherwise he could not have been admitted into the army. But these doctrines might require expansion, or at least evidence? Not at all: the Mussulman believes them incapable of either. But at least the Caliph might mount the pulpit in order to urge the primary duty of propagating the true faith? No; it was *not* the primary duty, it was a secondary duty; else there would have been no option allowed—tribute, death, or conversion. Well, then, the Caliph might ascend the pulpit for the purpose of enforcing a secondary duty? No, he could not, because that was no duty of time or place; it was a postulate of the conscience at all times alike, and needed no argument or illustration. Why, then, what *was* it that the Caliph talked about? It was this: He praised the man who had cut most throats; he pronounced the funeral panegyric of him who had his own throat cut under the banners of the Prophet; he explained the prudential merits of the next movement or of the next campaign. In fact, he did precisely what Pericles did, what Scipio did, what Cæsar did, what it was a regular part of the Roman Imperator’s commission to do, both before a battle and after a battle, and universally under any circumstances which make an explanation necessary. What is now done in “general orders” was then committed to a *viva voce* communication. Trifling communications probably devolved on the six centurions of each cohort (or regiment); graver communications were reserved to the Imperator, surrounded by his staff. Why we should mislead the student by calling this solemnity of addressing an army from a *tribunal* or *suggestus* by the irrelevant name of preaching from a pulpit can only be understood by those who perceive the false view taken of the Mohammedan faith and its relation to the human mind. It was certainly a poor plagiarism from the Judaic and the Christian creeds; but it did not rise so high as to conceive of any truth that needed or that admitted intellectual development, or that was susceptible of exposition and argument. However, if we will have it that the Caliph preached, then did his lieutenant say *Amen*. If Omar was a parson, then certainly Caled was his clerk.—DE Q.

man of Mohammedan twilight, his perfect bigotry denies him this characteristic resource of Christian energies. Just four centuries have we of the Cross propagated our light by this memorable invention ; just four centuries have the slaves of the Crescent clung to their darkness by rejecting it. Christianity signs her name ; Islamism makes her mark. And the great doctors of the Mussulmans take their stand precisely where Jack Cade took *his* a few years after printing had been discovered. Jack and they both made it felony to be found with a spelling-book, and sorcery to deal with syntax.

5. Yet, with these differences, all of us alike, Pagan, Mussulman, Christian, have practised the arts of public speaking as the most indispensable resource of public administration and of private intrigue. Whether the purpose were to pursue the interests of legislation, or to conduct the business of jurisprudence, or to bring the merits of great citizens pathetically before their countrymen ; or (if the state were democratic enough) oftentimes to explain the conduct of the executive government ; oftentimes also to prosecute a scheme of personal ambition : whether the audience were a mob, a senate, a judicial tribunal, or an army : equally (though not in equal degrees) for the Pagan of 2500 years back, and for us moderns, the arts of public speaking, and consequently of prose as opposed to metrical composition, have been the capital engine, the one great intellectual machine of civil life.

6. This to some people may seem a matter of course. "Would you have men speak in rhyme?" We answer that, when society comes into a state of refinement, the total uses of language are developed in common with other arts ; but originally, and whilst man was in his primitive condition of simplicity, it must have seemed an unnatural,

nay an absurd, thing to speak in prose. For in those elder days the sole justifying or exciting cases for a public harangue would be cases connected with impassioned motives. Rare they would be, as they had need to be, where both the "hon. gentleman" who moves, and his "hon. friend" who seconds, are required to speak in Trimeter Iambic. Hence the necessity that the oracles should be delivered in verse. Who ever heard of a prose oracle? And hence, as Grecian taste expanded, the disagreeable criticisms whispered about in Athens as to the coarse quality of the verses that proceeded from Delphi. It was like bad Latin from Oxford. Apollo himself to turn out of his own temple, in the very age of Sophocles, such Birmingham hexameters as sometimes astonished Greece, was like our English court keeping a Stephen Duck, the thresher, for the national poet-laureate, at a time when Pope was fixing an era in the literature. Metre fell to a discount in such learned times. But in itself metre must always have been the earliest vehicle for public enunciations of truth among men, for these obvious reasons:—  
1. That, if metre rises above the standard of ordinary household life, so must any truth of importance and singularity enough to challenge a public utterance; 2. That, because religious communications will always have taken a metrical form by a natural association of feeling, whatsoever is invested with a privileged character will seek something of a religious sanction by assuming the same external shape; and, 3. That expressions, or emphatic verbal forms, which are naturally courted for the sake of pointed effect, receive a justification from metre, as being already a departure from common usage to begin with, whereas in plain prose they would appear so many affectations. Metre is naturally and necessarily adopted in cases of im-

passioned themes, for the very obvious reason that rhythmus is both a cause of impassioned feeling, an ally of such feeling, and a natural effect of it; but upon other subjects, *not* impassioned, metre is also a subtle ally, because it serves to introduce and to reconcile with our sense of propriety various arts of condensation, of antithesis, and other rhetorical effects, which, without the metre (as a key for harmonizing them) would strike the feelings as unnatural or as full of affectation. Interrogations, for example, passionate ejaculations, etc., seem no more than natural when metre (acting as a key) has attuned and prepared the mind for such effects. The metre raises the tone of colouring so as to introduce richer tints without shocking or harshly jarring upon the presiding key, when without this semi-conscious pitching of the expectations the sensibility would have been revolted. Hence, for the very earliest stages of society, it will be mere nature that prompts men to metre; it is a mode of inspiration, it is a promise of something preternatural; and less than preternatural cannot be any possible emergency that should call for a public address. Only great truths could require a man to come forward as a spokesman; he is then a sort of interpreter between God and man.

7. At first, therefore, it is mere nature which prompts metre. Afterwards, as truth begins to enlarge itself—as truth loses something of its sanctity by descending amongst human details—that mode of exalting it, and of courting attention is dictated by artifice, which originally was a mere necessity of nature raised above herself. For these reasons, it is certain that men challenging high authentic character will continue to speak by metre for many generations after it has ceased to be a mere voice of habitual impulse. Whatsoever claims an oracular authority will

take the ordinary external form of an oracle. And, after it has ceased to be a badge of inspiration, metre will be retained as a badge of professional distinction. Pythagoras, for instance, within five centuries of Christ, Thales or Theognis, will adopt metre out of a secondary prudence; Orpheus and the elder Sibyl, out of an original necessity.

8. Those people are therefore mistaken who imagine that prose is either a natural or a possible form of composition in early states of society. It is such truth only as ascends from the earth, not such as descends from heaven, which can ever assume an unmetrical form. Now, in the earliest states of society, all truth that has any interest or importance for man will connect itself with heaven. If it does not originally come forward in that sacred character, if it does not borrow its importance from its sanctity, then, by an inverse order, it will borrow a sanctity from its importance. Even agricultural truth, even the homeliest truths of rural industry, brought into connexion with religious inspiration, will be exalted (like the common culinary utensils in the great vision of the Jewish prophet) and transfigured into vessels of glorious consecration. All things in this early stage of social man are meant mysteriously, have allegoric values; and week-day man moves amongst glorified objects. So that, if any doctrine, principle, or system of truth, should call for communication at all, infallibly the communication will take the tone of a revelation; and the holiness of a revelation will express itself in the most impassioned form, perhaps with accompaniments of music, but certainly with metre.

9. Prose, therefore, strange as it may seem to say so, was something of a discovery. If not great invention, at least great courage, would be required for the man who should first swim without the bladders of metre. It is all

very easy talking when you and your ancestors for fifty generations back have talked prose. But that man must have had *triplex æs*<sup>1</sup> about his *præcordia*<sup>2</sup> who first dared to come forward with pure prose as the vehicle for any impassioned form of truth. Even the first physician who dared to lay aside the ample wig and gold-headed cane needed *extra* courage. All the Jovian terrors of his traditional costume laid aside, he was thrown upon his mere natural resources of skill and good sense. Who was the first lion-hearted man that ventured to make sail in this frail boat of prose? We believe the man's name is reputed to have been Pherecydes. But, as nothing is less worth remembering than the mere hollow shell of a name where all the pulp and the kernel is gone, we shall presume Herodotus to have been the first respectable artist in prose. And what was this worthy man's view of prose? From the way in which he connected his several books or "fyttes" with the names of the muses, and from the romantic style of his narratives, as well as from his using a dialect which had certainly become a poetic dialect in literary Greece, it is pretty clear that Herodotus stood, and meant to stand, on that isthmus between the regions of poetry and blank unimpassioned prose which in modern literature is occupied by such works as *Mort d'Arthur*. In Thucydides, we see the first exhibition of stern philosophic prose. And, considering the very brief interval between the two writers, — who stand related to each other, in point of time, pretty much as Dryden and Pope, — it is quite impossible to look for the solution of their characteristic differences in the mere graduations of social development. Pericles, as a young man, would most certainly ask Herodotus to dinner, if business or curiosity ever drew that amiable writer to Athens. As an elderly

<sup>1</sup> [Triple brass.]

<sup>2</sup> [Heart; breast.]

man, Pericles must often have seen Thucydides at his levees; although by that time the sacrifice of his “social pleasure ill exchanged for power” may have abridged his opportunity of giving “feeds” to literary men. But will anybody believe that the mere advance of social refinement, within the narrow period of one man’s public life, could bring about so marvellous a change as that the friend of his youth should naturally write very much in the spirit of Sir John Mandeville, and the friend of his old age like Machiavel or Gibbon? No, no: the difference between these two writers does not reflect the different aspects of literary Greece at two eras so slightly removed, too great to be measured by that scale, as though those of the picturesque Herodotus were a splendid semi-barbarous generation, those of the meditative Thucydides, speculative, political, experimental; but we must look to subjective differences of taste and temperament in the men. The men, by nature, and by powerful determination of original sensibility, belong to different orders of intellect. Herodotus was the Froissart of antiquity. He was the man that should have lived to record the crusades. Thucydides, on the other hand, was obviously the Tacitus of Greece, who (had he been privileged to benefit by some metempsychosis dropping him into congenial scenes of modern history) would have made his election for the wars of the French League, or for our Parliamentary war, or for the colossal conflicts which grew out of the French Revolution. The one was the son of nature, fascinated by the mighty powers of chance or of tragic destiny, as they are seen in elder times moulding the form of empires, or training the currents of revolutions. The other was the son of political speculation, delighting to trace the darker agencies which brood in the mind of man — the subtle motives, the combinations, the plots which gather

in the brain of “dark viziers” when intrusted with the fate of millions, and the nation-wielding tempests which move at the bidding of the orator.

10. But these subjective differences were not all. They led to objective differences, by determining each writer's mind to a separate object. Does any man fancy that these two writers imagined, each for himself, the same audience? Or, again, that each represented his own audience as addressed from the same station? The earlier of the two, full of those qualities which fit a man for producing an effect as an artist, manifestly comes forward in a theatrical character, and addresses his audience from a theatrical station. Is it readers whom he courts? No, but auditors. Is it the literary body whom he addresses—a small body everywhere? No, but the public without limitation. Public! but what public? Not the public of Lacedæmon, drunk with the gloomy insolence of self-conceit; not the public of Athens, amiably vain, courteous, affable, refined! No: it is the public of universal Hellas, an august congress representing the total civilization of the earth,—so that of any man not known at Olympia, prince, emperor, whatever he might call himself, if he were not present in person or by proxy, you might warrantably affirm that he was *homo ignorabilis*—a person of whose existence nobody was bound to take notice; a man to be *ignored* by a grand jury. This representative *champ de Mai* Herodotus addressed. And in what character did he address it? What character did he ascribe to the audience? What character did he assume to himself? Them he addressed sometimes in their general character of human beings, but still having a common interest in a central network of civilization, investing a certain ring-fence, beginning in Sicily and Carthage, whence it ran round through Libya, Egypt, Syria, Persia, the Ionian belt

or zone, and terminating in the majestic region of *Men* — the home of liberty, the Pharos of truth and intellectual power, the very region in which they were all at that moment assembled. There was such a collective body, dimly recognized at times by the ancients, as corresponds to our modern Christendom, and having some unity of possible interest by comparison with the unknown regions of Scythias, Indias, and Ethiopias, lying in a far wider circle beyond — regions that, from their very obscurity, and from the utter darkness of their exterior relations, must at times have been looked to with eyes of anxiety as permanently harbouring that possible deluge of savage eruption which, about one hundred and fifty years after, did actually swallow up the Grecian colony of Bactria (or Bokhara), as founded by Alexander ; swallowed it so suddenly and so effectually that merely the blank fact of its tragical catastrophe has reached posterity. It was surprised probably in one night, like Pompeii by Vesuvius, or like the planet itself by Noah's flood ; or more nearly its fate resembled those starry bodies which have been seen, traced, recorded, fixed in longitude and latitude for generations, and then suddenly are observed to be *missing* by some of our wandering telescopes that keep watch and ward over the starry heavens. The agonies of a perishing world have been going on, but all is bright and silent in the heavenly host. Infinite space has swallowed up the infinite agonies. Perhaps the only record of Bactria was the sullen report of some courier from Susa, who would come back with his letters undelivered, simply reporting that, on reaching such a ferry on some nameless river, or such an outpost upon a heath, he found it in possession of a fierce, unknown race, the ancestors of future Afghans or Tartars.

11. Such a catastrophe, as menacing by possibility the whole of civilization, and under that hypothetical peril as

giving even to Greece herself an interest in the stability even of Persia, her sole enemy,—a great resisting mass interjacent between Greece and the unknown enemies to the far northeast or east,—could not but have mixed occasionally with Greek anticipations for the future, and in a degree quite inappreciable by us who know the geographical limits of Asia. To the ancients, these were by possibility, in a strict sense, infinite. The terror from the unknown Scythians of the world was certainly vague and indistinct; but, if that disarmed the terror or broke its sting, assuredly the very same cause would keep it alive, for the peril would often swell upon the eye merely from its uncertain limits. Far oftener, however, those glorious certainties revolved upon the Grecian imagination which presented Persia in the character of her enemy than those remote possibilities which might connect her as a common friend against some horrid enemy from the infinite deserts of Asia. In this character it was that Herodotus at times addressed the assembled Greece, at whose bar he stood. That the intensity of this patriotic idea intermitted at times; that it was suffered to slumber through entire books: this was but an artist's management which caused it to swell upon the ear all the more sonorously, more clamorously, more terrifically, when the lungs of the organ filled once more with breath, when the trumpet-stop was opened, and the “foudroyant” style of the organist commenced the hailstone chorus from Marathon. Here came out the character in which Herodotus appeared. The *Iliad* had taken Greece as she was during the building of the first temple at Jerusalem—in the era of David and Solomon—a thousand years before Christ. The eagle's plume in her cap at that era was derived from Asia. It was the Troad, it was Asia, that in those days constituted the great enemy of

Greece. Greece universal had been confederated against the Asia of that day, and, after an *Iliad* of woes, had triumphed. But now another era of five hundred years has passed since Troy. Again there has been a universal war raging between Greece and a great foreign potentate; again this enemy of Greece is called Asia. But what Asia? The Asia of the *Iliad* was a petty maritime Asia. But Asia now means Persia; and Persia, taken in combination with its dependencies of Syria and Egypt, means the world, *ἡ οἰκουμένη*. The frontier line of the Persian Empire "marched" or confined with the Grecian; but now so vast was the revolution effected by Cyrus that, had not the Persians been withheld by their dismal bigotry from cultivating maritime facilities, the Greeks must have sunk under the enormous power now brought to bear upon them. At one blow, the whole territory of what is now Turkey in Asia,—viz. the whole of Anatolia and of Armenia,—had been extinguished as a neutral and interjacent force for Greece. At one blow, by the battle of Thymbra, the Persian armies had been brought nearer by much more than a thousand miles to the gates of Greece.

**12.** That danger it is necessary to conceive, in order to conceive that subsequent triumph. Herodotus—whose family and nearest generation of predecessors must have trembled, after the thoughtless insult offered to Sardis, under the expectation of the vast revenge prepared by the Great King—must have had his young imagination filled and dilated with the enormous display of Oriental power, and been thus prepared to understand the terrific collisions of the Persian forces with those of Greece. He had heard in his travels how the glorious result was appreciated in foreign lands. He came back to Greece with a twofold freight of treasures. He had two messages for his country.

One was a report of all that was wonderful in foreign lands: all that was interesting from its novelty or its vast antiquity; all that was regarded by the natives for its sanctity, or by foreigners with amazement as a measure of colossal power in mechanics. And these foreign lands, we must remember, constituted the total world to a Greek. Rome was yet in her infant days, unheard of beyond Italy. Egypt and the other dependencies of Persia composed the total map south of Greece. Greece, with the Mediterranean islands, and the eastern side of the Adriatic, together with Macedon and Thrace, made up the world of Europe. Asia, which had not yet received the narrow limitation imposed upon that word by Rome, was co-extensive with Persia; and it might be divided into Asia *cis*-Tigritana, and Asia *trans*-Tigritana: the Euxine and the Caspian were the boundaries to the north; and to one advancing further the Oxus was the northern boundary, and the Indus the eastern. The Punjab, as far as the river Sutlej,—that is, up to our present British cantonments at Loodiana,—was indistinctly supposed to be within the jurisdiction of the Great King. Probably he held the whole intervening territory of the late Runjeet Singh, as now possessed by the Sikhs. And beyond these limits all was a mere zodiac of visionary splendour, or a dull repetition of monotonous barbarism.

13. The report which personal travels enabled Herodotus to make of this extensive region, composing neither more nor less than the total map of the terraqueous globe as it was then supposed to exist (all the rest being a mere Nova Zembla in their eyes), was one of two revelations which the great traveller had to lay at the feet of Greece. The other was a connected narrative of their great struggle with the King of Persia. The earth bisected itself into two

parts—Persia and Greece. All that was not Persia was Greece: all that was not Greece was Persia. The Greek traveller was prepared to describe the one section to the other section, and, having done this, to relate in a connected shape the recent tremendous struggle of the one section with the other. Here was Captain Cook fresh from his triple circumnavigation of the world: here was Mungo Park fresh from the Niger and Timbuctoo: here was Bruce fresh from the coy fountains of the Nile: here were Phipps, Franklin, Parry, from the Arctic circle: here was Leo Africanus from Moorish palaces: here was Mandeville from Prester John, and from the Cham of Tartary, and

“From Agra and Lahore of Great Mogul.”

This was one side of the medal; and on the other was the patriotic historian who recorded what all had heard by fractions, but none in a continuous series. Now, if we consider how rare was either character in ancient times, how difficult it was to travel where no passport made it safe, where no preparations in roads, inns, carriages, made it convenient; that, even five centuries in advance of this era, little knowledge was generally circulated of any region unless so far as it had been traversed by the Roman legions; considering the vast credulity of the audience assembled, a gulf capable of swallowing mountains, and, on the other hand, that here was a man fresh from the Pyramids and the Nile, from Tyre, from Babylon and the temple of Belus, a traveller who had gone in with his sickle to a harvest yet untouched; that this same man, considered as a historian, spoke of a struggle with which the earth was still agitated; that the people who had triumphed so memorably in this war happened to be the same people who were then listening; that the leaders in

this glorious war, whose names had already passed into spiritual powers, were the fathers of the present audience : combining into one picture all these circumstances, one must admit that no such meeting between giddy expectation and the very excess of power to meet its most clamorous calls is likely to have occurred before or since upon this earth. Hither had assembled people from the most inland and most illiterate parts of Greece,—people that would have settled a pension for life upon any man who would have described to them so much as a crocodile or ichneumon. To these people the year of his public recitation would be the meridian year of their lives. He saw that the whole scene would become almost a dramatic work of art: in the mere gratification of their curiosity, the audience might be passive and neutral ; but in the history of the war they became almost actors, as in a dramatic scene. This scenical position could not escape the traveller-historian. His work was recited with the exaggeration that belongs to scenic art. It was read probably with gesticulations by one of those thundering voices which Aristophanes calls a “damnable” voice, from its ear-piercing violence.

**14.** *Prose* is a thing so well known to all of us,—most of our “little accounts” from shoemakers, dressmakers, etc., being made out in prose; most of our sorrows and of our joys having been communicated to us through prose, and very few indeed through metre (unless on St. Valentine’s day),—that its further history, after leaving its original Olympic cradle, must be interesting to everybody. Who were they that next took up the literary use of Prose? Confining our notice to people of celebrity, we may say that the House of Socrates (*Domus Socratica* is the expression of Horace) were those who next attempted to popularize Greek prose,—viz. the old gentleman himself, the

founder of the concern, and his two apprentices, Plato and Xenophon. We acknowledge a sneaking hatred towards the whole household, founded chiefly on the intense feeling we entertain that all three were humbugs. We own the stony impeachment. Aristotle, who may be looked upon as literary grandson to Socrates, is quite a different person. But for the rest we cherish a sentimental (may we call it a Platonic?) disgust. As relates to the style, however, in which they have communicated their philosophy, one feature of peculiarity is too remarkable to pass without comment. Some years ago, in one of our four or five Quarterly Reviews (*Theological* it was, *Foreign*, or else *Westminster*), a critical opinion was delivered with respect to a work of Coleridge's which opens a glimpse into the true philosophy of prose composition. It was not a very good-natured opinion in that situation, since it was no more true of Coleridge than it is of every other man who adopts the same aphoristic form of expression for his thoughts ; but it was eminently just. Speaking of Coleridge's "Aphorisms," the reviewer observed that this detached and insulated form of delivering thoughts was, in effect, an evasion of all the difficulties connected with composition. Every man, as he walks through the streets, may contrive to jot down an independent thought, a shorthand memorandum of a great truth. So far as that purpose is concerned, even in tumultuous London,

"Puræ sunt plateæ, nihil ut meditantibus obstet."<sup>1</sup>

Standing on one leg you may accomplish this. The labour of composition begins when you have to put your separate threads of thought into a loom ; to weave them

<sup>1</sup> [The highways are clean, and nothing may annoy those who are pondering.]

into a continuous whole ; to connect, to introduce them ; to blow them out or expand them ; to carry them to a close. All this evil is evaded by the aphoristic form. This one remark, we repeat, lifts up a corner of that curtain which hangs over the difficult subjects of style and composition. Indicating what is *not* in one form, it points to what *is* in others. It was an original remark, we doubt not, to the reviewer. But it is too weighty and just to have escaped meditative men in former times ; and accordingly the very same remark will be found 150 years ago expanded in the *Huetiana*.

15. But what relation had this remark to the House of Socrates ? Did *they* write by aphorisms ? No, certainly ; but they did what labours with the same radical defect, considered in relation to the true difficulties of composition. Let us dedicate a paragraph to these great dons of literature. If we have any merely English scholars amongst our readers, it may be requisite first to inform them that Socrates himself wrote nothing. He was too much occupied with his talking — “*ambitiosa loquela.*” In this respect Socrates differed, as in some others that we could mention, from the late Mr. Coleridge, who found time both for talking and for writing at the least 25 volumes octavo. From the pupils of Socrates it is that we collect his pretended philosophy ; and, as there were only two of these pupils who published, and as one of them intensely contradicts the other, it would be found a hard matter at *Nisi Prius*<sup>1</sup> to extract any verdict as to what it was that constituted the true staple of the Socratic philosophy. We fear that any jury who undertook that question would finally be carted to the bounds of the county, and shot into the adjacent county like a ton of coals. For

<sup>1</sup> [First trial.]

Xenophon uniformly introduces the worthy henpecked philosopher as prattling innocent nothings, more limpid than small beer ; whilst Plato never lets him condescend to any theme less remote from humanity than those of Hermes Trismegistus. One or other must be a liar. And the manner of the philosopher, under these two Boswellian reporters, is not less different than his matter. With Xenophon, he reminds us much of an elderly hen, superannuated a little, pirouetting to "the hen's march," and clucking vociferously ; with Plato, he seems much like a deep-mouthed hound in a chase after some unknown but perilous game,—much as such a hound is described by Wordsworth, ranging over the aerial heights of Mount Righi, his voice at times muffled by mighty forests, and then again swelling as he emerges upon the Alpine breezes, whilst the vast intervals between the local points from which the intermitting voice ascends proclaim the storm pace at which he travels. In Plato there is a gloomy grandeur at times from the elementary mysteries of man's situation and origin, snatches of music from some older and Orphic philosophy, which impress a vague feeling of solemnity towards the patriarch of the school, though you can seldom trace *his* movement through all this high and vapoury region. You would be happy, therefore, to believe that there had been one word of truth in ascribing such colloquies to Socrates ; but how that can be, when you recollect the philosophic *vappa*<sup>1</sup> of Xenophon, seems to pass the deciphering power of Oedipus.

16. Now, this body of inexplicable discord between the two evangelists of Socrates, as to the whole sources from which he drew his philosophy, as to the very wells from which he raised it, and the mode of medicating the draught,

<sup>1</sup> [Flat wine.]

makes it the more worthy of remark that both should have obstinately adopted the same disagreeable form of composition. Both exhibit the whole of their separate speculations under the form of dialogue. It is always Socrates and Crito, or Socrates and Phædrus, or Socrates and Ischomachus,—in fact, Socrates and some man of straw or good-humoured nine-pin set up to be bowled down as a matter of course. How inevitably the reader feels his fingers itching to take up the cudgels instead of Crito for one ten minutes! Had *we* been favoured with an interview, we can answer for it that the philosopher should not have had it all his own way; there should have been a “scratch” at least between us; and, instead of waiting to see Crito punished without delivering one blow that would “have made a dint in a pound of butter,” posterity should have formed a ring about us, crying out “Pull baker, pull devil,” according as the accidents of the struggle went this way or that. If dialogue must be the form, at least it should not have been collusive dialogue. Whereas, with Crito and the rest of the men who were in training for the part of disputants, it was a matter of notoriety that, if they presumed to put in a sly thrust under the ribs of the philosopher, the Socratic partisans, *οἱ αὐτῷ τὸν Σωκρατῆν*, would kick them into the kennel. It was a permanent “cross” that was fought throughout life between Socrates and his obsequious antagonists.

17. As Plato and Xenophon must have hated each other with a theological hatred, it is a clear case that they would not have harmonized in anything if they had supposed it open to evasion. They would have got another atmosphere had it been possible. Diverging from each other in all points beside, beyond doubt they would have diverged as to this form of dialogue, had they not conceived that it was

essential to the business of philosophy. It is plain from this one fact how narrow was the range of conception which the Socratic school applied to the possible modes of dealing with polemic truth. They represented the case thus:— Truth, they fancied, offered itself by separate units, by moments (to borrow a word from dynamics), by what Cicero calls “apices rerum”<sup>1</sup> and “punctiunculae.”<sup>2</sup> Each of these must be separately examined. It was like the *items* in a disputed account. There must be an auditor to check and revise each severally for itself. This process of auditing could only be carried on through a brisk dialogue. The philosopher in monologue was like a champion at a tournament with nobody to face him. He was a chess-player with no opponent. The game could not proceed. But how mean and limited a conception this was, which lay as a basis for the whole Socratic philosophy, becomes apparent to any man who considers any ample body of truth, whether polemic truth, or not, in all its proportions. Yet, in all this, we repeat, the Socratic weakness is not adequately exposed. There is a far larger and subtler class of cases where the arguments for and against are not susceptible of this separate valuation. One is valid only through and by a second, which second again is involved in a third; and so on. Thus, by way of a brief instance, take all the systems of Political Economy which have grown up since Turgot and Quesnel. They are all polemic: that is, all have moulded themselves in hostility to some other system; all had their birth in opposition. But it would be impossible to proceed Socratically with any one of them. If you should attempt to examine Ricardo sentence by sentence, or even chapter for chapter, his apologist would loudly resist such a process as inapplicable. You must *hold on*; you must keep fast

<sup>1</sup> [The points of things.]

<sup>2</sup> [Prickings.]

hold of certain principles until you have time to catch hold of certain others — seven or eight, suppose ; and then from the whole taken in continuation, but not from any one as an insulated principle, you come into a power of adjudicating upon the pretensions of the whole theory. The Doctrine of Value, for example, could you understand that taken apart ? could you value it apart ? As a Socratic logician, could you say of it either *affirmatur* or *negatur*, until you see it coming round and revolving in the doctrines of rent, profits, machinery, etc., which are so many functions of value ; and which doctrines first react with a weight of verification upon the other ?

18. These, unless parried, are knock-down blows to the Socratic, and therefore to the Platonic, philosophy, if treated as a *modus philosophandi* ;<sup>1</sup> and, if that philosophy is treated as a body of doctrines apart from any *modus* or *ratio docendi*,<sup>2</sup> we should be glad to hear what they are, — for we never could find any whatever in Plato or Xenophon which are insisted on as essential. Accidental hints and casual suggestions cannot be viewed as doctrines in that sense which is necessary to establish a separate school. And all the German Tiedemanns and Tennemanns, the tedious men and the tenpenny-men, that have written their twelve or their eighteen volumes *viritim*<sup>3</sup> upon Plato, will find it hard to satisfy their readers unless they make head against these little objections, because these objections seem to impeach the very *method* of the “Socraticæ Chartæ,” and, except as the authors or illustrators of a method, the Socratics are no school at all.

19. But are not we travelling a little out of our proper field in attacking this method ? Our business was with

<sup>1</sup> [Method of philosophical inquiry.]

<sup>2</sup> [Method or rationale of teaching.]

<sup>3</sup> [Man by man.]

this method considered as a *form of style*, not considered as a *form of logic*. True, O rigorous reader! Yet digressions and moderate excursions have a licence. Besides which, on strict consideration, doubts arise whether we *have* been digressing; for whatsoever acted as a power on Greek prose through many ages, whatsoever gave it a bias towards any one characteristic excess, becomes important in virtue of its relations to our subject. Now, the form of dialogue so obstinately maintained by the earliest philosophers who used prose as the vehicle of their teaching had the unhappy effect of impressing, from the earliest era of Attic literature, a colloquial taint upon the prose literature of that country. The great authority of Socrates, maintained for ages by the windiest of fables, naturally did much to strengthen this original twist in the prose style. About fifty years after the death of Socrates, the writings of Aristotle were beginning to occupy the attention of Greece; and in them we see as resolute a departure from the dialogue form as in his elders of the same house the adherence to that form had been servile and bigoted. His style, though arid from causes that will hereafter be noticed, was much more dignified, or at least more grave and suitable to philosophic speculation, than that of any man before him. Contemporary with the early life of Socrates was a truly great man, Anaxagoras, the friend and reputed preceptor of Pericles. It is probable he may have written in the style of Aristotle. Having great systematic truths to teach, such as solved existing phenomena, and not such as raised fresh phenomena for future solution, he would naturally adopt the form of continuous exposition. Nor do we at this moment remember a case of any very great man who had any real and novel truth to communicate having adopted the form of dialogue, excepting only the case of Galileo.

Plato, indeed, is *reputed*, and Galileo is known, to have exacted geometry as a qualification in his students,—that is, in those who paid him a *διδακτρον* or fee for the privilege of personally attending his conversations; but he demanded no such qualification in his readers, or else we can assure him that very few copies of his *Opera Omnia* would have been sold in Athens. This low qualification it was for the readers of Plato, and still more for those of Xenophon, which operated to diffuse the reputation of Socrates. Besides, it was a rare thing in Greece to see two men sounding the trumpet on behalf of a third; and we hope it is not ungenerous to suspect that each dallied with the same purpose as our Chatterton and Macpherson,—viz. to turn round on the public when once committed and compromised by some unequivocal applause, saying “Gentlemen of Athens, this idol Socrates is a phantom of my brain: as respects the philosophy ascribed to him, *I am Socrates*,” —or, as Handel (who, in consideration of his own preternatural appetite, had ordered dinner for six) said to the astonished waiter when pleading, as his excuse for not bringing up the dishes, that he waited for the company,—“Yong man, *I am de gombany.*”

20. But in what mode does the conversational taint which we trace to the writings of the Socratici, enforced by the imaginary martyrdom of Socrates, express itself? In what forms of language? By what peculiarities? By what defects of style? We will endeavour to explain. One of the Scaligers (if we remember, it was the elder), speaking of the Greek article *ὁ ή το*, called it *loquacissimæ gentis flabellum*.<sup>1</sup> Now, *pace superbissimi viri*,<sup>2</sup> this seems nonsense because the use of the article was not capricious,

<sup>1</sup> [The toy of this most garrulous folk.]

<sup>2</sup> [With the leave of this most arrogant man.]

but grounded in the very structure and necessities of the Greek language. Garrulous or not, the poor men were obliged, by the philosophy of their tongue, to use the article in certain situations; and, to say the truth, these situations were very much the same as in English. Allowing for a few cases of proper names, participles, or adjectives postponed to their substantives, etc., the two general functions of the article definite, equally in Greek and in English, are: *1st*, to individualize, as, *e.g.*, "It is not any sword that will do, I will have *the* sword of my father"; and, *2d*, the very opposite function, viz. to generalize in the highest degree—a use which our best English grammars wholly overlook: as, *e.g.*, "Let *the* sword give way to *the* gown"—not that particular sword, but every sword (where each is used as a representative symbol of the corresponding professions); "*The* peasant presses on the kibes of *the* courtier" (where the class is indicated by the individual). In speaking again of diseases and the organs affected, we usually accomplish this generalization by means of the definite article. We say "He suffered from *a* headache"; but also we say "from *the* headache"; and invariably we say "He died of *the* stone," etc. And, though we fancy it a peculiarity of the French language to say "*Le cœur* lui était navré de douleur,"<sup>1</sup> yet we ourselves say "The heart was affected in his case." In all these uses of the definite article there is little real difference between the Greek language and our own. The main difference is in the negative use; in the meaning implied by the absence of the article, which, with the Greeks, expresses our article *a*, but with us is a form of generalization. In all this there was nothing left free to the choice; and Scaliger had no right to find any illustration of Greek levity in what was unavoidable.

<sup>1</sup> [His heart was broken with grief.]

21. But what we tax as undignified in the Greek prose style, as a badge of garrulity, as a taint from which the Greek prose never cleansed itself, are all those forms of lively colloquialism, with the fretfulness and hurry and demonstrative energy of people unduly excited by bodily presence and by ocular appeals to their sensibility. Such a style is picturesque, no doubt. So is the Scottish dialect of low life as first employed in novels by Sir Walter Scott; that dialect greatly assisted the characteristic expression; it furnished the benefit of a Doric dialect: but what man in his senses would employ it in a grave work, and speaking in his own person? Now, the colloquial expletives so profusely employed by Plato more than anybody, the forms of his sentences, the forms of his transitions, and other intense peculiarities of the chattering man as opposed to the meditating man, have crept over the face of Greek literature; and, though some people think everything holy which is printed in Greek characters, we must be allowed to rank these forms of expression as mere vulgarities. Sometimes, in Westmoreland, if you chance to meet an ancient father of his valley,—one who is thoroughly vernacular in his talk, being unsinged by the modern furnace of revolution,—you may have a fancy for asking him how far it is to the next town. In which case you will receive for answer pretty nearly the following words:—“Why like, it’s gaily nigh like to four mile like.” Now, if the pruriency of your curiosity should carry you to torment and vex this aged man by pressing a special investigation into this word *like*, the only result is likely to be that you will kill *him*, and do yourself no good. Call it an expletive indeed! a filling up! Why, to him it is the only indispensable part of the sentence; the sole fixture. It is the balustrade which enables him to descend the stairs of conversation without falling

overboard ; and, if the word were proscribed by Parliament, he would have no resource but in everlasting silence. Now, the expletives of Plato are as gross, and must have been to the Athenian as unintelligible, as those of the Westmoreland peasant. It is true, the value, the effect to the feelings, was secured by daily use and by the position in the sentence. But so it is to the English peasant. *Like* in his use is a modifying, a restraining, particle, which forbids you to understand anything in a dangerous unconditional sense. But then, again, the Greek particle of transition, that eternal δε, and the introductory formula of μεν and δε ! However earnestly people may fight for them, because Greek is now past mending, in fact the δε is strictly equivalent to the *whereby* of a sailor : “ whereby I went to London ; whereby I was robbed ; whereby I found the man that robbed me ” ! All relations, all modes of succession or transition, are indicated by one and the same particle. This could arise, even as a licence, only in the laxity of conversation. But the most offensive indication of the conversational spirit as *presiding* in Greek prose is to be found in the morbid energy of oaths scattered over the face of every prose composition which aims at rhetorical effect. The literature is deformed with a constant roulade of “ by Jove,” “ by Minerva,” etc., as much as the conversation of high-bred Englishmen in the reign of Charles II. In both cases this habit belonged to a state of transition ; and, if the prose literature of Greece had been cultivated by a succession of authors as extended as that of England, it would certainly have outworn this badge of spurious energy. That it did not is a proof that the Greek Literature never reached the consummation of art.

### PART III

1. Reader, you are beginning to suspect us. “How long do we purpose to detain people?” For anything that appears we may be designing to write on to the twentieth century,—for twice thirty years. “And *whither* are we going? towards what object?”—which is as urgent a quære as *how far*. Perhaps we may be leading you into treason, or (which indeed is pretty much the same thing) we may be paving the way to “Repeal.” You feel symptoms of doubt and restiveness; and, like Hamlet with his father’s ghost, you will follow us no further, unless we explain what it is that we are in quest of.

2. Our course, then, for the rest of our progress,—the outline of our method,—will pursue the following objects. We shall detain you a little longer on the Grecian Prose Literature; and we shall pursue that Literature within the gates of Latium. What was the Grecian idea of *style*, what the Roman, will appear as a deduction from this review. With respect to the Greeks, we shall endeavour to show that they had not arrived at a full expanded consciousness of the separate idea expressed by *style*; and, in order to account for this failure, we shall point out the deflexion, the bias, which was impressed upon the Greek speculations in this particular by the tendency of their civil life. *That* was made important in the eyes of the speculative critic which was indispensable for the actual practitioner; *that* was indispensable for the actual practitioner which was exacted by the course of public ambition. The political

aspirant, who needed a command of fluent eloquence, sought for so much knowledge (and no more) as promised to be available in his own particular mode of competition. The speculative critic or professional master of rhetoric offered just so much information (and no more) as was likely to be sought by his clients. Each alike cultivated no more than experience showed him would be demanded. But in Rome, and for a reason perhaps which will appear worth pausing upon, a subtler conception of style was formed, though still far from being perfectly developed. The Romans, whether worse orators or not than the Grecians, were certainly better rhetoricians. And Cicero, the mighty master of language for the Pagan world, whom we shall summon as our witness, will satisfy us that in this research at least the Roman intellect was more searching, and pressed nearer to the undiscovered truth, than the Grecian.

3. From a particular passage in the *De Oratore*, which will be cited for the general purpose here indicated of proving a closer approximation on the part of Roman thinkers than had previously been made to the very heart of this difficult subject, we shall take occasion to make a still nearer approach for ourselves. We shall endeavour to bring up our reader to the fence, and persuade him, if possible, to take the leap which still remains to be taken in this field of style. But, as we have reason to fear that he will "refuse" it, we shall wheel him round and bring him up to it from another quarter. A gentle touch of the spur may then perhaps carry him over. Let not the reader take it to heart that we here represent him under the figure of a horse, and ourselves in a nobler character as riding him, and that we even take the liberty of proposing to spur him. Anything may be borne in metaphor. Figuratively, one may kick a man without

offence. There are no limits to allegoric patience. But no matter who takes the leap, or how; a leap there is which must be taken in the course of these speculations on style before the ground will be open for absolute advance. Every man who has studied and meditated the difficulties of style must have had a subconscious sense of a bar in his way at a particular point of the road thwarting his free movement; he could not have evaded such a sense but by benefit of extreme shallowness. That bar which we shall indicate must be cleared away, thrown down, or surmounted. And then the prospect will lie open to a new map, and a perfect map, of the whole region. It will then become possible for the first time to overlook the whole geography of the adjacencies. An entire theory of the difficulties being before the student, it will at length be possible to aid his efforts by ample *practical* suggestions. Of these we shall ourselves offer the very plainest, viz. those which apply to the mechanology of style. For these there will be an easy opening; they will not go beyond the reasonable limits disposable for a single subject in a literary journal. As to the rest, which would (Germanly speaking) require a "strong" octavo for their full exposition, we shall hold ourselves to have done enough in fulfilling the large promise we have made — the promise of marking out for subsequent cultivation and development all the possible subdivisions and sections amongst the resources of the rhetorician, all the powers which he can employ, and therefore all the difficulties which he needs to study, — the arts by which he can profit, and, in correspondence with them, the obstacles by which he will be resisted. Were this done, we should no longer see those incoherent sketches which are now circulating in the world upon questions of taste, of science, of practical address, as applied to the management of style.

and rhetoric ; the public ear would no longer be occupied by feeble Frenchmen — Rollin, Rapin, Batteux, Bouhours, Du Bos, and *id genus omne* ;<sup>1</sup> nor by the elegant but desultory Blair ; nor by scores of others who bring an occasional acuteness or casual information to this or that subsection of their duty, whilst (taken as general guides) they are universally insufficient. No ; but the business of rhetoric, the management of our mother-tongue in all offices to which it can be applied, would become as much a matter of systematic art, as regular a subject for training and mechanic discipline, as the science of discrete quantity in Arithmetic, or of continuous quantity in Geometry. But will not *that* be likely to impress a character of mechanic monotony upon style, like the miserable attempts at reforming handwriting ? Look at them, touch them, or, if you are afraid of soiling your fingers, hold them up with the tongs ; they reduce all characteristic varieties of writing to one form of blank identity, and *that* the very vilest form of scribbling which exists in Europe — viz. to the wooden scratch (as if traced with a skewer) universally prevailing amongst French people. Vainly would Aldorisius apply his famous art (viz. the art of deciphering a man's character from handwriting) to the villainous scrawls which issue from this modern laboratory of pseudo-calligraphy. All pupils under *these* systems write alike ; the predestined thief is confounded with the patriot or martyr ; the innocent young girl with the old hag that watches country waggons for victims. In the same indistinguishable character, so far as this reforming process is concerned, would Joseph Hume sign a motion for retrenching three half-crowns per annum from the orphan daughter of a man who had died in battle, and Queen Adelaide write a subscription towards a fresh church for

<sup>1</sup> [And all that tribe.]

carrying on war, from generation to generation, upon sin and misery.

4. Now, if a mechanic system of training for style would have the same levelling effects as these false calligraphies, better by far that we should retain our old ignorance. If art is to terminate in a killing monotony, welcome the old condition of inartificial simplicity! So say you, reader; ay, but so say we. This does not touch *us*: the mechanism *we* speak of will apply to no meritorious qualities of style, but to its faults, and, above all, to its awkwardness; in fact, to all that now constitutes the *friction* of style, the needless joltings and retardations of our fluent motion. As to the motion itself in all that is positive in its derivation, in its exciting impulses, in its speed, and its characteristic varieties, it will remain unaffected. The modes of human feeling are inexhaustible; the forms by which feeling connects itself with thought are indefeasibly natural; the channels through which both impress themselves upon language are infinite. All these are imperturbable by human art; they are past the reach of mechanism; you might as well be afraid that some steam-engine—Atlas, suppose, or Samson (whom the Germans call Simpson)—should perfidiously hook himself to the earth's axis, and run away with us to Jupiter. Let Simpson do his worst; we defy him. And so of style: in that sense under which we all have an interest in its free movements it will for ever remain free. It will defy art to control it. In that sense under which it ever *can* be mechanized we have all an interest in wishing that it should be so. Our final object therefore is a meritorious one, with no intermixture of evil. This being explained, and our course onwards having been mapped out, let us now proceed with our work, first recapitulating in direct

juxtaposition with each other the points of our future movement :— 1. Greek and Latin Literature we shall touch on only for the sake of appraising or deducing the sort of ideas which they had upon the subject of style. It will appear that these ideas were insufficient. At the best they were tentative. 2. From them, however, may be derived a hint, a dim suggestion, of the true question in arrear ; and, universally, that goes a great way towards the true answer. “*Dimidium facti*,” says the Roman proverb, “*qui bene cœpit, habet*”: to have made a good beginning is one half of the work. *Prudens interrogatio*, says a wise modern,— to have shaped your question skilfully,— is, in that sense, and with a view to the answer, a good beginning. 3. Having laid this foundation towards an answer, we shall then attempt the answer itself. 4. After which,— that is, after removing to the best of our power such difficulties to the *higher understanding* as beset the subject of style, rhetoric, composition,— having (if we do not greatly delude ourselves) removed the one great bar to a right theory of style, or a practical discipline of style,— we shall leave to some future work of more suitable dimensions the filling up of our outline. Ourselves we shall confine to such instant suggestions — practical, popular, broadly intelligible — as require no extensive preparation to introduce them on the author’s part; no serious effort to understand them on the reader’s. Whatever is more than this will better suit with the variable and elastic proportions of a separate book than with the more rigid proportions of a miscellaneous journal.

5. Coming back, then, for hasty purposes, to Greek Literature, we wish to direct the reader’s eye upon a remarkable phenomenon in the history of that literature, and subsequently of all human genius; not *so* remarkable but

that multitudes must have noticed it, and yet remarkable enough to task a man's ingenuity in accounting for it. The earliest known occasion on which this phenomenon drew a direct and strong gaze upon itself was in a little historical sketch composed by a Roman officer during the very opening era of Christianity. We speak of the *Historia Romana*, written and published about the very year of the crucifixion by Velleius Paterculus, in the court of Tiberius Cæsar, the introduction to which presents us with a very interesting outline of general history. The style is sometimes clumsy and unwieldy, but nervous, masculine, and such as became a soldier. In higher qualities, in thoughtfulness, and the spirit of finer observation, it is far beyond the standard of a mere soldier; and it shows, in common with many other indications lying on the face of Roman society at that era, how profoundly the great struggles that had recently convulsed the world must have terminated in that effect which followed in the wake of the French Revolution, — viz. in a vast stimulation to the meditative faculties of man. The agitation, the frenzy, the sorrow of the times, reacted upon the human intellect, and forced men into meditation. Their own nature was held up before them in a sterner form. They were compelled to contemplate an ideal of man far more colossal than is brought forward in the tranquil aspects of society; and they were often engaged, whether they would or not, with the elementary problems of social philosophy. Mere danger forced a man into thoughts which else were foreign to his habits. Mere necessity of action forced him to decide. Such changes went along with the Reformation; such changes went along with the French Revolution; such changes went along with the great recasting of Roman society under the two earliest Cæsars. In every

page of Paterculus we read the swell and agitation of waters subsiding from a deluge. Though a small book, it is tumid with revolutionary life. And something also is due, no doubt, to the example of the mighty leader in the Roman Revolution, to the intellectual and literary tastes diffused by him —

“The foremost man of all this world” —

who had first shown the possibility of uniting the military leader’s truncheon with the most brilliant *stylus* of the rhetorician. How wonderful and pleasing to find such accomplishments of accurate knowledge, comprehensive reading and study, combined with so searching an intellect, in a man situated as Paterculus, reared amongst camps, amidst the hurry of forced marches, and under the privations of solitary outposts ! The old race of hirsute centurions how changed, how perfectly regenerated, by the influence of three Cæsars in succession applying a paternal encouragement to Literature !

6. Admiring this man so much, we have paused to review the position in which he stood. Now, recurring to that remark (amongst so many original remarks) by which, in particular, he connects himself with our subject, we may venture to say that, if it were a very just remark for *his* experience, it is far more so for ours. What he remarked, what he founded upon a review of two nations and two literatures, we may now countersign by an experience of eight or nine. His remark was upon the tendency of intellectual power to gather in clusters,—its unaccountable propensity (he thought it such) to form into separate insulated groups. This tendency he illustrates first in two cases of Grecian literature. Perhaps that might have been an insufficient basis for a general

theory. But it occurred to Paterculus in confirmation of his doctrine that the very same tendency had reappeared in his native literature. The same phenomenon had manifested itself, and more than once, in the history of Roman intellect; the same strong *nusus* of great wits to gather and crystallize about a common nucleus. That marked gregariousness in human genius had taken place amongst the poets and orators of Rome which had previously taken place amongst the poets, orators, and artists of Greece. What importance was attached by Paterculus to this interesting remark, what stress he laid upon its appreciation by the reader, is evident from the emphatic manner in which he introduces it, as well as from the conscious disturbance of the symmetry which he incurs rather than suppress it. These are his words:—“ Notwithstanding that this section of my work has considerably outrun the proportions of that model which I had laid down for my guidance, and although perfectly aware that, in circumstances of hurry so unrelenting, which, like a revolving wheel or the eddy of rapid waters, allows me no respite or pause, I am summoned rather to omit what is necessary than to court what is redundant: still, I cannot prevail on myself to forbear from uttering and giving a pointed expression to a thought which I have often revolved in my mind, but to this hour have not been able satisfactorily to account for in theory (*nequeo tamen temperare mihi quin rem sœpe agitatam animo meo, neque ad liquidum ratione perductam, signem stylo*).” Having thus bespeak the reader’s special attention, the writer goes on to ask if any man can sufficiently wonder on observing that eminent genius in almost every mode of its development (*eminentissima cujusque professionis ingenia*) had gathered itself into the same narrow ring-fence of a single generation. Intellects that in each

several department of genius were capable of distinguished execution (*cujusque clari operis capacia ingenia*) had sequestered themselves from the great stream and succession of their fellow-men into a close insulated community of time and into a corresponding stage of proficiency measured on their several scales of merit<sup>1</sup> (*in similitudinem et temporum et profectuum semetipsa ab aliis separaverunt*). Without giving *all* the exemplifications by which Paterculus has supported this thesis, we shall cite two: *Una (neque multorum annorum spatio divisa) ætas per divini spiritus viros, Æschylum, Sophoclem, Euripidem, illustravit Tragædiam.*<sup>2</sup> Not that this trinity of poets was *so* contemporary as brothers are; but they were contemporary as youthful uncles in relation to elderly nephews: Æschylus was viewed as a senior by Sophocles, Sophocles by Euripides; but all might by possibility have met together (what a constellation!) at the same table. Again, says Paterculus, *Quid ante Isocratem, quid post ejus auditores, clarum in oratoribus fuit?* Nothing of any distinction in oratory *before* Isocrates, nothing *after* his

<sup>1</sup> Paterculus, it must be remembered, was composing a peculiar form of history, and, therefore, under a peculiar law of composition. It was designed for a rapid survey of many ages within a very narrow compass, and unavoidably pitched its scale of abstraction very high. This justified a rhetorical, almost a poetic, form of expression; for in such a mode of writing, whether a writer seeks that effect or not, the abrupt and almost lyrical transitions, the startling leaps over vast gulfs of time and action, already have the effect of impassioned composition. Hence, by an instinct, he becomes rhetorical: and the natural character of his rhetoric, its pointed condensation, often makes him obscure at first sight. We, therefore, for the merely English reader, have a little expanded or at least brought out his meaning. But, for the Latin reader, who will enjoy his elliptical energy, we have sometimes added the original words.—DE Q.

<sup>2</sup> [One age (nor that of many years) produced Tragedy in the men of divine spirit, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.]

personal audience. So confined was that orbit within which the perfection of Greek tragedy, within which the perfection of Greek eloquence, revolved. The same law, the same strong tendency, he insists, is illustrated in the different schools of Greek comedy, and again of Greek philosophy. Nay, it is more extensively illustrated amongst Greek artists in general: *Hoc idem evenisse grammaticis, plastis, pictoribus, sculptoribus, quisquis temporum institerit notis reperiet.*<sup>1</sup>

7. From Greece Paterculus translates the question to his own country in the following pointed manner: summing up the whole doctrine, and re-affirming it in a form almost startling and questionable by its rigour: “*Adeo arctatum angustiis temporum,*” so punctually concentrated was all merit within the closest limits of time, “*ut nemo memoria dignus alter ab altero videri nequiverint*”: no man of any consideration but he might have had ocular cognizance of all others in his own field who attained to distinction. He adds: “*Neque hoc in Græcis quam in Romanis evenit magis.*”<sup>2</sup>

8. His illustrations from the Roman Literature we do not mean to follow: one only, as requisite for our purpose, we cite:—“*Oratio, ac vis forensis, perfectumque prosæ eloquentiæ decus (pace P. Crassi et Gracchorum dixerim) ita universa sub principe operis sui erupit Tullio ut mirari neminem possis nisi aut ab illo visum aut qui illum viderit.*” This is said with epigrammatic point: the perfection of prose and the brilliancy of style as

<sup>1</sup> [He ascertains that the same thing had taken place among grammarians, modellers, painters, and statuaries, whoever of them had left notable impress on the time.]

<sup>2</sup> [Nor was this fact more noteworthy among the Greeks than among the Romans.]

an artificial accomplishment, was so identified with Cicero's generation that no distinguished artist, none whom you could greatly admire, but might be called his contemporary: none so much his senior but Cicero might have seen *him*; none so much his junior but *he* might have seen Cicero. It is true that Crassus, in Cicero's infancy, and the two Gracchi, in the infancy of Crassus (neither of whom, therefore, could have been seen by Cicero), were memorably potent as orators,—in fact, for tragical results to themselves (which, by the way, was the universal destiny of great *Roman* orators); and nobody was more sensible of their majestic pretensions, merely as orators, than Cicero himself, who has accordingly made Crassus and Antony predominant speakers in his splendid dialogues *De Oratore*. But they were merely demoniac powers, not artists. And, with respect to these early orators (as also with respect to some others, whose names we have omitted), Paterculus has made a special reservation. So that he had not at all overlooked the claims of these great men; but he did not feel that any real exception to his general law was created by orators who were indeed wild organs of party rage or popular frenzy, but who wilfully disdained to connect themselves with the refinements of literature. Such orators did not regard themselves as intellectual, but as political, powers. Confining himself to oratory, and to the perfection of prose composition, written or spoken, in the sense of great literary accomplishments, beginning in natural power but perfected by art, Paterculus stands to his assertion that this mode of human genius had so crowded its development within the brief circuit of Cicero's life (threescore years and three) as that the total series of Roman Orators formed a sort of circle, centring in that supreme orator's

person, such as in modern times we might call an electrical circle,—each link of the chain having been either electrified by Cicero or having electrified *him*. Seneca, with great modesty, repeats the very same assertion in other words: “*Quicquid Romana facundia habuit quod insolenti Græciæ aut opponat aut preferat circa Ciceronem efflouruit.*”<sup>1</sup> A most ingenuous and self-forgetting homage in him; for a nobler master of thinking than himself Paganism has not to show, nor, when the cant of criticism has done its worst, a more brilliant master of composition. And, were his rule construed literally, it would exclude the two Plinys, the two Senecas, Tacitus, Quintilian, and others, from the matricula of Roman eloquence. Not one of these men could have seen Cicero; all were divided by more than one generation; and yet, most unquestionably, though all were too reasonable to have fancied themselves any match for the almighty orator in public speaking, not one but was an equally accomplished artist in written composition, and under a law of artificial style far more difficult to manage.

9. However, with the proper allowances for too unmodified a form of expression, we must allow that the singular phenomenon first noticed by Paterculus, as connecting itself with the manifestations of human genius, is sufficiently established by so much of human history as even he had witnessed. For, if it should be alleged that political changes accounted for the extinction of oral eloquence concurrently with the death of Cicero, still there are cases more than enough even in the poetry of both Greece and Rome, to say nothing of the arts, which bear out the general fact of human genius coming forward by insulated

<sup>1</sup> [Whatever excellence Rome had produced which might be opposed or preferred to the haughtiness of Greece, flourished in Cicero's time.]

groups and clusters ; or, if Pagan ages had left that point doubtful, we have since witnessed Christian repetitions of the truth on the very widest scale. The Italian age of Leo X., in the fifteenth century, the French age of Louis XIV., in the seventeenth century, the German age commencing with Kant, Wieland, Goethe, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, all illustrate the tendency to these intermitting paroxysms of intellectual energy. The lightning and the storm seem to have made the circuit of the whole European heavens, to have formed vortices successively in every civilized land, and to have discharged themselves by turns from every quarter of the atmosphere. In our own country there have been three such gatherings of intellectual power: *1st*, The age of Shakspere, Spenser, and the great school of dramatists that were already dying out in the latter days of Ben Jonson (1636), and were finally extinguished by the great civil commotions beginning in 1642; *2dly*, The age of Queen Anne and George I; *3dly*, The age commencing with Cowper, partially roused perhaps by the American War, and afterwards so powerfully stimulated (as was the corresponding era of Kant and Wieland) by the French Revolution. This last volcanic eruption of the British genius has displayed enormous power and splendour. Let malice and the base detraction of contemporary jealousy say what it will, greater originality of genius, more expansive variety of talent, never was exhibited than in our own country since the year 1793. Every mode of excellence, except only dramatic excellence (in which we have nothing modern to place by the side of Schiller's *Wallenstein*), has been revealed in dazzling lustre. And he that denies it, may he be suffocated by his own bilious envy !

10. But the point upon which we wish to fix the reader's

attention in citing this interesting observation of the Roman officer, and the reason for which we have cited it at all, is not so much for the mere fact of these spring-tides occurring in the manifestations of human genius, intermitting pulses (so to speak) in human energies, as the psychological peculiarity which seems to affect the cycle of their recurrences. Paterculus occupies himself chiefly with the *causes* of such phenomena; and one main cause he suggests as lying in the emulation which possesses men when once a specific direction has been impressed upon the public competitions. This no doubt is one of the causes. But a more powerful cause perhaps lies in a principle of union than in any principle of division amongst men,—viz. in the principle of sympathy. The great Italian painters, for instance, were doubtless evoked in such crowds by the action of this principle. To hear the buzz of idolizing admiration settling for years upon particular works of art and artists kindles something better than merely the ambition and rivalship of men; it kindles feelings happier and more favourable to excellence, viz. genial love and comprehension of the qualities fitted to stir so profound and lasting an emotion. This contagion of sympathy runs electrically through society, searches high and low for congenial powers, and suffers none to lurk unknown to the possessor. A vortex is created which draws into its suction whatever is liable to a similar action. But, not to linger upon this question of causes, what we wish to place under the reader's eye is rather the peculiar type which belongs to these revolutions of national intellect, according to the place which each occupies in the order of succession. Possibly it would seem an over-refinement if we were to suggest that the odd terms in the series indicate creative energies, and the even terms reflective energies; and we

are far enough from affecting the honours of any puerile hypothesis. But, in a general way, it seems plausible and reasonable that there will be alternating successions of power in the first place, and next of reaction upon that power from the reflective faculties. It does seem natural that first of all should blossom the energies of creative power, and in the next era of the literature, when the consciousness has been brightened to its own agencies, will be likely to come forward the re-agencies of the national mind on what it has created. The period of meditation will succeed to the period of production. Or, if the energies of creation are again partially awake, finding themselves forestalled as regards the grander passions, they will be likely to settle upon the feebler elements of manners. Social differences will now fix the attention by way of substitute for the bolder differences of nature. Should a third period, after the swing of the pendulum through an arch of centuries, succeed for the manifestation of the national genius, it is possible that the long interval since the inaugural era of creative art will have so changed all the elements of society and the aspects of life as to restore the mind to much of its infant freedom; it may no longer feel the captivity of an imitative spirit in dealing with the very same class of creations as exercised its earliest powers. The original national genius may now come forward in perfectly new forms without the sense of oppression from inimitable models. The hoar of ages may have withdrawn some of these models from active competition. And thus it may not be impossible that oscillations between the creative and reflective energies of the mind might go on through a cycle of many ages.

11. In our own literature we see this scheme of oscillations illustrated. In the Shakspere period we see the

fulness of life and the enormity of power throwing up a tropical exuberance of vegetation. A century afterwards we see a generation of men lavishly endowed with genius, but partly degraded by the injurious training of a most profligate era growing out of great revolutionary convulsions, and partly lowered in the tone of their aspirations by a despair of rivalling the great creations of their predecessors. We see them universally acquiescing in humbler modes of ambition; showing sometimes a corresponding merit to that of their greatest forefathers, but merit (if sometimes equal) yet equal upon a lower scale. Thirdly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we see a new birth of original genius, of which it is not lawful to affirm any absolute inferiority even by comparison with the Shaksperian age of Titans. For whatsoever is strictly and thoroughly original, being *sui generis*,<sup>1</sup> cannot be better or worse than any other model of excellence which is also original. One animal structure compared with another of a different class is equally good and perfect. One valley which is no copy of another, but has a separate and peculiar beauty, cannot be compared for any purpose of disadvantage with another. One poem which is composed upon a law of its own, and has a characteristic or separate beauty of its own, cannot be inferior to any other poem whatsoever. The class, the order, may be inferior; the scale may be a lower one; but the individual work, the degree of merit marked upon the scale must be equal, if only the poem is equally original. In all such cases understand, ye miserable snarlers at contemporary merit, that the puerile *goût de comparaison*<sup>2</sup> (as La Bruyère calls it) is out of place; universally you cannot affirm any *imparity* where the ground is preoccupied by *disparity*.

<sup>1</sup> [The only one of its kind.]

<sup>2</sup> [Liking for comparison.]

Where there is no parity of principle there is no basis for comparison.

12. Now, passing, with the benefit of these explanations, to Grecian Literature, we may observe that there were in that field of human intellect no more than two developments of power from first to last. And, perhaps, the unlearned reader (for it is to the praise and honour of a powerful journal that it has the unlearned equally with the learned amongst its readers) will thank us for here giving him, in a very few words, such an account of the Grecian Literature in its periods of manifestation, and in the relations existing between these periods, that he shall not easily forget them.

13. There were, in illustration of the Roman aide-de-camp's<sup>1</sup> doctrine, two groups or clusters of Grecian wits, two depositions or stratifications of the national genius; and these were about a century apart. What makes them specially rememberable is the fact that each of these brilliant clusters had gathered separately about that man as

<sup>1</sup> “*The Roman aide-de-camp's*” :—Excuse, reader, this modern phrase: by what other is it possible to express the relation to Tiberius, and the military office about his person, which Paterculus held on the German frontier? In the 104th chapter of his second book he says—“*Hoc tempus me, functum ante tribunatu castrorum, Tib. Cæsaris militem fecit*”; which in our version is—“This epoch placed me, who had previously discharged the duties of camp-marshall, upon the staff of Cæsar.” And he goes on to say that, having been made a brigadier-general of cavalry (*alæ præfectorus*) under a commission which dated from the very day of Cæsar's adoption into the Imperial house and the prospect of succession,—so that the two acts of grace ran concurrently,—thenceforwards “per annos continuos IX præfectorus aut legatus, spectator, et pro captu mediocritatis meæ adjutor, fui”; or, as I beg to translate, “through a period of nine consecutive years from this date, I acted either as military lieutenant to Cæsar, or as ministerial secretary” (such we hold to be the true virtual equivalent of *præfectorus*; i.e. speaking fully, of *præfectorus prætorio*); “acting simultaneously as inspector of the public works” (bridges and vast fortifications on the northeast German frontier), “and (to the best

central pivot who, even apart from this relation to the literature, was otherwise the leading spirit of his age. It is important for our purpose—it will be interesting, even without that purpose, for the reader—to notice the distinguishing character or marks by which the two clusters are separately recognized; the marks both personal and chronological. As to the personal distinctions, we have said that in each case severally the two men who offered the nucleus to the gathering happened to be otherwise the most eminent and splendid men of the period. Who were they? The one was PERICLES, the other was ALEXANDER OF MACEDON. Except Themistocles, who may be ranked as senior to Pericles by just one generation (or thirty-three years),<sup>1</sup> in the whole deduction of Grecian annals no other

capacity of my slender faculties) as his personal aide-de-camp." Possibly the reader may choose to give a less confined or professional meaning to the word *adjutor*. But, in apology, we must suggest two cautions to him: 1st, That elsewhere Paterculus does certainly apply the term as a military designation, bearing a known technical meaning; and, 2d, That this word *adjutor*, in other non-military uses, as for instance on the stage, had none *but* a technical meaning.—DE Q.

<sup>1</sup>This is too much to allow for a generation in those days, when the average duration of life was much less than at present; but, as an exceedingly convenient allowance (*since thrice 33½ is just equal to a century*), it may be allowedly used in all cases not directly bearing on technical questions of civil economy. Meantime, as we love to suppose ourselves in all cases as speaking *virginibus puerisque*,—who, though reading no man's paper throughout, may yet often read a page or a paragraph of every man's,—we, for the chance of catching their eye in a case where they may really gain in two minutes an ineradicable conspectus of the Greek Literature (and for the sake of ignorant people universally, whose interests we hold sacred), add a brief explanation of what is meant by *a generation*. Is it meant or imagined that in so narrow a compass as 33 years + 4 months the whole population of a city, or a people, could have died off? By no means: not under the lowest value of human life. What is meant is—that a number *equal* to the whole population will have died: not X, the actual population, but a number equal to X. Suppose the population of Paris 900,000. Then, in the time allowed for one genera-

public man, statesman, captain-general, administrator of the national resources, can be mentioned as approaching to these two men in splendour of reputation, or even in real merit. Pisistratus was too far back; Alcibiades, who might (chronologically speaking) have been the son of Pericles, was too unsteady and (according to Mr. Coleridge's coinage) "unreliable," or, perhaps in more correct English, too "*unrelyuponable*."

14. Thus far our purpose prospers. No man can pretend to forget two such centres as Pericles for the elder group, or Alexander of Macedon (the "strong he-goat" of Jewish prophecy) for the junior. Round these two *foci*, in two different but adjacent centuries, gathered the total starry heavens—the galaxy, the Pantheon—of Grecian intellect. All that Greece produced of awful solemnity in her tragic stage, of riotous mirth and fancy in her comic stage, of power in her eloquence, of wisdom in her philosophy; all that has since tingled in the ears of twenty-four centuries of her prosperity in the arts, her sculpture, her architecture, her painting, her music; everything, in short, excepting only her higher mathematics, which waited for a further development which required the incubation of the

tion, 900,000 will have died: but then, to make up that number, there will be 300,000 furnished, not by the people now existing, but by the people who *will be born* in the course of the 33 years. And thus the balloting for death falls only upon two out of three whom at first sight it appears to hit. It falls not exclusively upon X, but upon X+Y: this latter quantity Y being a quantity flowing concurrently with the lapse of the generation. Obvious as this explanation is, and almost childish, to every man who has even a tincture of political arithmetic, it is so far from being generally obvious that, out of every thousand who will be interested in learning the earliest revolutions of literature, there will not be as many as ten who will know, even conjecturally, what is meant by a generation. Besides infinite other blunders and equivocations, many use an *age* and a *generation* as synonymous, whilst by *siecle* the French uniformly mean a *century*.—DE Q.

musing intellect for yet another century, revolved like two neighbouring planetary systems about these two solar orbs. Two mighty vortices, Pericles and Alexander the Great, drew into strong eddies about themselves all the glory and the pomp of Greek literature, Greek eloquence, Greek wisdom, Greek art. Next, that we may still more severely search the relations in all points between the two systems, let us assign the chronological *locus* of each, because that will furnish another element towards the exact distribution of the chart representing the motion and the oscillations of human genius. Pericles had a very long administration. He was Prime Minister of Athens for upwards of one entire generation. He died in the year 429 before Christ, and in a very early stage of that great Peloponnesian War which was the one sole intestine war for Greece, affecting *every* nook and angle in the land. Now, in this long public life of Pericles, we are at liberty to fix on *any* year as his chronological *locus*. On good reasons, not called for in this place, we fix on the year 444 before Christ. This is too remarkable to be forgotten. *Four, four, four*, what at some games of cards is called a "*prial*" (we presume, by an elision of the first vowel *a*, for *parial*), forms an era which no man can forget. It was the fifteenth year before the death of Pericles, and not far from the bisecting year of his political life. Now, passing to the other system, the *locus* of Alexander is quite as remarkable, as little liable to be forgotten when once indicated, and more easily determined, because selected from a narrower range of choice. The exact chronological *locus* of Alexander the Great is 333 years before Christ. Everybody knows how brief was the career of this great man: it terminated in the year 320 before Christ. But the *annus mirabilis* of his public life, the most effective and productive year through-

out his oriental anabasis, was the year 333 before Christ. Here we have another “*prial*,” a prial of threes, for the *locus* of Alexander, *if properly corrected*.

15. Thus far the elements are settled, the chronological longitude and latitude of the two great planetary systems into which the Greek Literature breaks up and distributes itself: 444 and 333 are the two central years for the two systems; allowing, therefore, an interspace of 111 years between the *foci* of each. It is thought by some people that all those stars which you see glittering so restlessly on a keen frosty night in a high latitude, and which seem to have been sown broadcast with as much carelessness as grain lies on a threshing-floor,—here showing vast zaarrahs of desert blue sky, there again lying close and to some eyes presenting

“The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest,”—

are in fact all gathered into zones or *strata*; that our own wicked little earth (with the whole of our peculiar solar system) is a part of such a zone, and that all this perfect geometry of the heavens, these radii in the mighty wheel, would become apparent if we, the spectators, could but survey it from the true centre,—which centre may be far too distant for any vision of man, naked or armed, to reach. However that may be, it is most instructive to see how many apparent scenes of confusion break up into orderly arrangement when you are able to apply an *a priori* principle of organization to their seeming chaos. The two vortices of the Greek Literature are now separated; the chronological *loci* of their centres are settled. And next we request the reader thoughtfully to consider who *they* are of whom the elder system is composed.

16. In the centre, as we have already explained, is Pericles, the great practical statesman, and that orator of whom (amongst so many that vibrated thunderbolts) it was said peculiarly that he thundered and lightened as if he held this Jovian attribute by some individual title. We spare you Milton's magnificent description from the *Paradise Regained* of such an orator "wielding at will that fierce democracy," partly because the closing line in its reference to "*Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne,*" too much points the homage to Demosthenes, but still more because by too trivial a repetition of splendid passages a serious injury is done to great poets. Passages of great musical effect, metrical bravuras, are absolutely vulgarized by too perpetual a parrotting; and the care of Augustus Cæsar *ne nomen suum obsolefieret*,<sup>1</sup> that the majesty of his name should not be vulgarized by bad poets, is more seriously needed in our days on behalf of great poets, to protect them from trivial or too parrot-like a citation.

17. Passing onwards from Pericles, you find that all the rest in *his* system were men in the highest sense creative,

<sup>1</sup> The oddest feature in so odd a business was that Augustus committed this castigation of bad poets to the police; but whence the police were to draw the skill for distinguishing between good poets and bad is not explained. The poets must have found their weak minds somewhat astonished by the sentences of these reviewers—sitting like our Justices in Quarter Sessions, and deciding perhaps very much in the same terms; treating an Ode, if it were too martial, as a breach of the peace; directing an Epic poet to find security for his good behaviour during the next two years; and, for the writers of Epithalamia on imperial marriages, ordering them "to be privately whipped and discharged." The whole affair is the more singular as coming from one who carried his *civilitas*, or show of popular manners, even to affectation. Power, without the invidious exterior of power, was the object of his life. Ovid seems to have noticed his inconsistency in this instance by reminding him that even Jupiter did not disdain to furnish a theme for panegyric.—DE Q.

absolutely setting the very first examples, each in his peculiar walk of composition ; themselves without previous models, and yet destined every man of them to become models for all after-generations ; themselves without fathers or mothers, and yet having all posterity for their children. First come the three men *divini spiritus*, under a heavenly afflatus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, the creators of Tragedy out of a village mummery ; next comes Aristophanes, who breathed the breath of life into Comedy ; then comes the great philosopher, Anaxagoras, who first theorized successfully upon man and the world. Next come, whether great or not, the still more *famous* philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon ; then comes, leaning upon Pericles, as sometimes Pericles leaned upon *him*, the divine artist, Phidias ;<sup>1</sup> and behind this immortal man walk Herodotus and Thucydides. What a procession to Eleusis would these men have formed ! what a frieze, if some great artist could arrange it as dramatically as Chaucer has arranged the *Pilgrimage to Canterbury* !

18. It will be granted that this is unmasking a pretty strong battery of great guns for the Athens of Pericles. Now, let us step on a hundred years forward. We are now within hail of Alexander ; and a brilliant consistory of Grecian men *that is by which he* is surrounded. There are now exquisite masters of the more refined comedy ; there are, again, great philosophers, for all the great schools are represented by able successors ; and, above all others, there is the one philosopher who played with men's minds

1 “*Phidias*” :—That he was as much of a creative power as the rest of his great contemporaries, that he did not merely take up or pursue a career already opened by others, is pretty clear from the state of Athens, and of the forty marble quarries which he began to lay under contribution. The quarries were previously unopened; the city was as yet without architectural splendour.—DE Q.

(according to Lord Bacon's comparison) as freely as ever his princely pupil with their persons — there is Aristotle. There are great orators, and, above all others, there is that orator whom succeeding generations (wisely or not) have adopted as the representative name for what is conceivable in oratorical perfection — there is Demosthenes. Aristotle and Demosthenes are in themselves bulwarks of power ; many hosts lie in those two names. For artists, again, to range against Phidias, there is Lysippus the sculptor, and there is Apelles the painter ; for great captains and masters of strategic art, there is Alexander himself, with a glittering *cortége* of general officers, well qualified to wear the crowns which they will win, and to head the dynasties which they will found. Historians there are now, as in that former age ; and, upon the whole, it cannot be denied that the "turnout" is showy and imposing.

19. Before coming to that point, — that is, before comparing the second "deposit" (geologically speaking) of Grecian genius with the first, — let us consider what it was (if anything) that connected them. Here, reader, we would wish to put a question. Saving your presence, Did you ever see what is called a dumb-bell ? We have ; and know it by more painful evidence than that of sight.

20. You, therefore, O reader ! if personally cognizant of dumb-bells, we will remind, — if not, we will inform, — that it is a cylindrical bar of iron or lead issuing at each end in a globe of the same metal, and usually it is sheathed in green baize ; but, perfidiously so, if that covering is meant to deny or to conceal the fact of those heart-rending thumps which it inflicts upon one's too confiding fingers every third *ictus*. By the way, we have a vague remembrance that the late Mr. Thurtell, the same who was generally censured for murdering the late Mr. Weare, once in

a dark lobby attempted to murder a friend by means of a dumb-bell ; in which he showed his judgment, — we mean in his choice of tools, — for otherwise, in attempting to murder his friend, he was to blame. Now, reader, it is under this image of the dumb-bell we couch an allegory. Those globes at each end are the two systems or separate clusters of Greek Literature ; and that cylinder which connects them is the long man that ran into each system, binding the two together. Who was that ? It was Isocrates. *Great* we cannot call him in conscience ; and, therefore, by way of compromise, we call him *long*, — which, in one sense, he certainly was ; for he lived through four-and-twenty Olympiads, each containing four solar years. He narrowly escaped being a hundred years old ; and, though that did not carry him from centre to centre, yet, as each system might be supposed to pretend a radius each way of twenty years, he had, in fact, a full personal cognizance (and pretty equally) of the two systems, remote as they were, which composed the total world of Grecian Genius. Two circumstances have made this man interesting to all posterity ; so that people the most remote and different in character (Cicero, for instance, and Milton) have taken a delight in his memory. One is, that the school of rhetoric in Athens, which did not finally go down till the reign of Justinian, and therefore lasted above 940 years without interruption, began with *him*. He was, says Cicero, *De Orat.*, “pater eloquentiæ”<sup>1</sup>; and elsewhere he calls him “communis magister oratorum.”<sup>2</sup> True, he never practised himself, for which he had two reasons : “My lungs,” he tells us himself, “are weak”; and, secondly, “I am naturally, as well as upon principle, a coward.” There he was right. A man would never have seen twenty-four Olympiads, who had gone about brawling and giving

<sup>1</sup> [The father of eloquence.]    <sup>2</sup> [The master of all orators in common.]

"jaw" as Demosthenes and Cicero did. You see what they made of it. The other feature of interest in this long man is precisely that fact, viz. that he *was* long. Everybody looks with kindness upon the snowy-headed man who saw the young prince Alexander of Macedon within four years of his starting for Persia, and personally knew most of those that gave lustre to the levees of Pericles. Accordingly, it is for this quality of length that Milton honours him with a touching memorial; for Isocrates was "that old man eloquent" of Milton's sonnet whom the battle of Chæronea, "fatal to liberty, killed with report." This battle, by which Philip overthrew the last struggles of dying independence in Greece, occurred in the year 338 before Christ. Philip was himself assassinated two years later. Consequently, had Isocrates pulled out, like caoutchouc or Indian rubber, a little longer, he might have seen the silver shields, or Macedonian life-guards, embarking for Persia. In less than five years from that same battle, "fatal to liberty," Alexander was taking fatal liberties with Persia, and "ticking the catastrophe" of Darius. There were just seventy good years between the two expeditions,—the Persian anabasis of Cyrus the younger, and the Persian anabasis of Alexander; but Isocrates knew personally many officers and *savans*<sup>1</sup> in both.

21. Others, besides Cicero and Milton, have taken a deep interest in Isocrates,—and, for the very circumstance we

<sup>1</sup> "Officers and *savans*":—Ctesias held the latter character, Xenophon united both, in the earlier expedition. These were friends of Isocrates. In the latter expedition, the difficulty would have been to find the man, whether officer or *savant*, who was *not* the friend of Isocrates. Old age such as his was a very rare thing in Greece; a fact which is evident from a Greek work surviving on the subject of Macrobiotics: few cases occur beyond seventy. This accident, therefore, of longevity in Isocrates must have made him already one of the standing lions in Athens for the last twenty-six years of his life;

have been noticing, his *length*, combined with the accident of position which made that length effective in connecting the twofold literature of Greece. Had he been “*long*” in any other situation than just in that dreary desert between the oasis of Pericles and the oasis of Alexander, what good would that have done us? “A wounded snake” or an Alexandrine verse, that “drags its slow length along,” would have been as useful. But he, feeling himself wanted, laid his length down like a railroad exactly where he could be useful—with his positive pole towards Pericles and his negative pole towards Alexander. Even Gibbon—even the frosty Gibbon—condescends to be pleased with this seasonable application of his two termini: “Our sense,” says he, in his 40th chapter, “of the dignity of human nature is exalted<sup>1</sup> by the simple recollection that Isocrates

while, for the last seventy, his professorship of rhetoric must have brought him into connexion with every great family in Greece. One thing puzzles us,—what he did with his money: for he must have made a great deal. He had two prices; for he charged high to those who could afford it; and why not? people are not to learn the art of prating for nothing. Yet, being a teetotaller and a coward, how could he spend his money? That question is vexatious. However, this one possibility in the long man’s life will for ever make him interesting: he might have seen, and it is even possible that he *did* see Xenophon dismount from some horse which he had stolen at Trebizond on his return from the Cyrus expedition; and he might also have seen Alexander mount for Chaeronea. Alexander was present at that battle, and personally joined in a charge of cavalry. It is not impossible that he may have ridden Bucephalus.—DE Q.

<sup>1</sup> “*Is exalted*”:—The logic of Gibbon may seem rather cloudy. Why should it exalt our sense of human dignity that Isocrates was the youthful companion of Plato or Euripides and the aged companion of Demosthenes? It ought, therefore, to be mentioned that, in the sentence preceding, he had spoken of Athens as a city that “condensed within the period of a single life the genius of ages and millions.” The condensation is the measure of the dignity; and Isocrates, as the “single life” alluded to, is the measure of the condensation. That is the logic. By the way, Gibbon ought always to be cited by the *chapter*. The page and volume of course evanesce with many

was the companion of Plato and Xenophon,—that he assisted, perhaps with the historian Thucydides, at the first representations of the *Oedipus* of Sophocles and the *Iphigenia* of Euripides.” So far in relation to the upper terminus of the long man; next, with reference to the lower terminus, Gibbon goes on: “And that his pupils, Æschines and Demosthenes, contended for the *crown* of patriotism in the presence of Aristotle, the master of Theophrastus, who taught at Athens with the founders of the Stoic and Epicurean sects.”

**22.** Now then, reader, you have arrived at that station from which you overlook the whole of Greek Literature, as a few explanations will soon convince you. Where is Homer, where is Hesiod? you ask; where is Pindar? Homer and Hesiod lived a thousand years b.c., or, by the lowest computations, near nine hundred. For anything that we know, they may have lived with Tubal Cain. At all events, they belong to no power or agency that set in motion the age of Pericles, or that operated on that age. Pindar, again, was a solitary emanation of some unknown influences at Thebes, more than five hundred years before Christ. He may be referred to the same era as Pythagoras. These are all that can be cited *before* Pericles.

**23.** Next, for the ages *after* Alexander, it is certain that Greece proper was so much broken in spirit by the loss of her *autonomy* dating from that era as never again to have rallied sufficiently to produce a single man of genius,—not one solitary writer who acted as a power upon the national mind. Callimachus was nobody, and not decidedly forms of publication, whilst the chapter is *always* available; and, in the commonest form of twelve volumes, becomes useful in a second function, as a guide to the particular volume; for six chapters, with hardly any exception (*if any*) are thrown into each volume. Consequently, the 40th chapter, standing in the seventh series of sixes, indicates the seventh volume.—DE Q.

Grecian. Theocritus, a man of real genius in a limited way, is a Grecian in that sense only according to which an Anglo-American is an Englishman. Besides that, one swallow does not make a summer. Of any other writers, above all others of Menander, apparently a man of divine genius, we possess only a few wrecks; and of Anacreon, who must have been a poet of original power, we do not certainly know that we have even any wrecks. Of those which pass under his name, not merely the authorship, but the era, is very questionable indeed. Plutarch and Lucian, the unlearned reader must understand, both belong to *post-Christian* ages. And, for all the Greek emigrants who may have written histories, such as we now value for their matter more than for their execution, one and all they belong too much to Roman civilization that we should ever think of connecting them with native Greek literature.<sup>1</sup> Polybius in the days of the second Scipio, Dion Cassius and Appian in the acme of Roman civility, are no more Grecian authors because they wrote in

<sup>1</sup> Excepting fragmentary writers, — Sappho and Simonides, and the contributors to the Greek Anthologies (which, however, next after the scenic literature, offer the most interesting expressions of Greek household feeling), — we are not aware of having omitted in this rapid review any one name that could be fancied to be a weighty name, excepting that of Lycophron. Of him we will say a word or two: — The work by which he is known is a monologue or dramatic scene from the mouth of one single speaker; this speaker is Cassandra the prophetic daughter of Priam. In about 1500 Iambic lines (the average length of a Greek tragedy) she pours forth a dark prophecy with respect to all the heroes engaged in the Trojan War, typifying their various unhappy catastrophes by symbolic images which should naturally be intelligible enough to us who know their several histories, but which (from the particular selection of accidents or circumstances used for the designation of the persons) read like riddles without the aid of a commentator. This prophetic gloom, and the impassioned character of the many woes arising notoriously to the conquerors as well as the conquered in the sequel of the memorable war, give a colouring of dark power to the *Cassandra* of Lycophron. Else we con-

Greek than the Emperor Marcus Antoninus, or Julian, were other than Romans because, from monstrous coxcombray, they chose to write in Greek their barren memoranda. As well might Gibbon be thought not an Englishman, or Leibnitz not a German, because the former, in composing the first draft of his essay on literature, and the latter in composing his *Theodicée*, used the French language. The motive in all these cases was analogous: amongst the Greek writers it was the affectation of reaching a particular body of educated men, a learned class, to the exclusion of the uninstructed multitude. With the affecters of French the wish was to reach a particular body of thinkers, with whose feelings they had a special sympathy from personal habituation of their society, and to whose prejudices, literary or philosophic, they had adapted their train of argument.

**24.** No; the Greek Literature ends at the point we have fixed, viz. with the era of Alexander. No power, no heart-subduing agency, was ever again incarnated in any book, system of philosophy, or other model of creative energy, growing upon Grecian soil or from Grecian roots. Creation was extinct; the volcano was burnt out. What books appeared at scattered intervals during the three centuries still remaining before the Christian era lie under a reproach, pretty general, which perhaps has not been perceived. From the titles and passing notices of their objects, or mode of dealing with their objects, such as we

fess to the fact of not having been much impressed by the poem. We read it in the year 1809, having been told that it was the most difficult book in the Greek language. This is the popular impression, but a very false one. It is not difficult at all as respects the language (allowing for a few peculiar Lycophrontic words); the difficulty lies in the allusions, which are *intentionally obscure*. Lycophron did as we now do in eclipses—he *smoked the glass through which he gazed*.—DE Q.

derive from Cicero and many others, it is evident that they were merely professional books, text-books for lectures addressed to students, or polemic works addressed to competitors. Chairs of Rhetoric and Philosophy had now been founded in Athens. A great University, the resort of students from all nations, was established, and, in a sense sufficient to insure the perpetual succession of these corporate bodies, was endowed. Books, therefore, and labouring with the same two opposite defects as are unjustly charged upon the schoolmen of the middle ages, — viz. dulness from absolute monotony, and visionariness from the aerial texture of the speculations, — continued to be written in discharge of professional obligations, or in pursuit of professional interest. The *summum bonum* was discussed until it had become the capital affliction of human patience, the *summum malum* of human life. Beyond these there was no literature; and these products of dreaming indolence, which terminated in making the very name of Greek philosopher and Greek rhetorician a jest and byword amongst the manlier Romans, no more constituted a literature than a succession of academic studies from the pupils of a royal institution can constitute a school of fine art.

25. Here, therefore, at this era of Alexander, 333 B.C., — when every Greek patriot had reason to say of his native literature “*Venimus ad summum fortunæ,*” We have seen the best of our days, — we must look for the Greek ideas of style, and the Greek theories of composition, in the uttermost development that either *could* have received. In the earlier system of Greek intellectual strength, in the era of Pericles, the powers of style would be most comprehensively exercised. In the second system, in the era of Alexander, the light of conscious recognition

and direct examination would be most effectually applied. The first age furnished the power; the second furnished the science. The first brought the concrete model, the second brought the abstracting skill; and between them the whole compass of Greek speculation upon this point would be brought to a focus. Such being the state of preparation, what was the result?

## PART IV

1. “*Such being the state of preparation, what was the result?*” These words concluded our last essay. There had been two manifestations or bright epiphanies of the Grecian intellect, revelations in two separate forms: the first having gathered about Pericles in the year 444 B.C., the second about Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.; the first being a pure literature of creative power, the second in a great measure of reflective power; the first fitted to call out the differences of style, the second to observe, classify, and discuss them. Under these circumstances of favourable preparation, what had been the result? Where style exists in strong colouring as a practice or art, we reasonably expect that style should soon follow as a theory, as a science explaining that art, tracing its varieties, and teaching its rules. To use ancient distinctions, where the “*rhetorica utens*” has been cultivated with eminent success (as in early Greece it had) it is but natural to expect many consequent attempts at a “*rhetorica docens.*” And especially it is natural to do so in a case where the theorizing intellect had been powerfully awakened. What, therefore, we ask again, had been in fact the result?

2. We must acknowledge that it had fallen far below the reasonable standard of our expectations. Greece, it is true, produced a long series of works on rhetoric, many of which, though not easily met with,<sup>1</sup> survive to this day;

<sup>1</sup> “*Not easily met with*”:—From Germany we have seen reprints of some eight or nine; but once only, so far as our bibliography extends, were the whole body published collectively. This was at the Aldine press in Venice

and one which stands first in order of time, viz. the great work of Aristotle, is of such distinguished merit that some eminent moderns have not scrupled to rank it as the very foremost legacy in point of psychological knowledge which Pagan Literature has bequeathed to us. Without entering upon so large a comparison as that, we readily admit the commanding talent which this work displays. But it is under an equivocal use of the word "rhetoric" that the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle could ever have been classed with books treating of style. There is in fact a complex distinction to which the word rhetoric is liable. 1st, it means the *rhetorica utens*, as when we praise the rhetoric of Seneca or Sir Thomas Browne, not meaning anything which they taught, but something which they practised,—not a doctrine which they delivered, but a machinery of composition which they employed. 2dly, it means the *rhetorica docens*, as when we praise the Rhetoric of Aristotle or Hermogenes, writers far enough from being rhetorical by their own style of writing, but writers who professedly taught others to be rhetorical. 3dly, the *rhetorica utens* itself is subdivided into two meanings, so wide apart that they have very little bearing on each other: one being applied to the art of persuasion, the dexterous use of plausible topics for recommending any opinion whatever to the favour of an audience (this is the Grecian sense universally); the other being applied to the art of composition, the art of treating any subject ornamentally, gracefully, affectingly. There is another use of the word rhetoric distinct from all these, and hitherto, we believe, not consciously noticed; of which at some other time.

more than three centuries ago. Such an interval, and so solitary a publication, sufficiently explain the non-familiarity of modern scholars with this section of Greek Literature.—DE Q.

3. Now, this last subdivision of the word rhetoric, viz. "Rhetoric considered as a practising art, *rhetorica utens*," — which is the sense exclusively indicated by our modern use of the term, — is not at all concerned in the Rhetoric of Aristotle. It is rhetoric as a mode of moral suasion, as a technical system for obtaining a readiness in giving to the false a colouring of plausibility, to the doubtful a colouring of probability, or in giving to the true, when it happens to be obscure, the benefit of a convincing exposition — this it is which Aristotle undertakes to teach, and not at all the art of ornamental composition. In fact, it is the whole body of public *extempore* speakers whom he addresses, not the body of deliberate writers in any section whatever. And, therefore, whilst conceding readily all the honour which is claimed for that great man's Rhetoric, by this one distinction as to what it was that he meant by Rhetoric, we evade at once all necessity for modifying our general proposition, — viz. that style in our modern sense, as a theory of composition, as an art of constructing sentences and weaving them into coherent wholes, was not effectually cultivated amongst the Greeks. It was not so well understood, nor so distinctly contemplated in the light of a separate accomplishment, as afterwards among the Romans. And we repeat that this result from circumstances *prima facie* so favourable to the very opposite result is highly remarkable. It is *so* remarkable that we shall beg permission to linger a little upon those features in the Greek Literature which most of all might seem to have warranted our expecting from Greece the very consummation of this delicate art. For these same features, which would separately have justified that expectation, may happen, when taken in combination with others, to account for its disappointment.

4. There is, then, amongst the earliest phenomena of the Greek Literature, and during its very inaugural period, one which of itself and singly furnishes a presumption for expecting an exquisite investigation of style. It lies in the fact that two out of the three great tragic poets carried his own characteristic quality of style to a morbid excess,—to such an excess as should force itself, and in fact *did* force itself, into popular notice. Had these poets all alike exhibited that sustained and equable tenor of tragic style which we find in Sophocles, it is not probable that the vulgar attention would have been fixed by its character. Where a standard of splendour is much raised, provided all parts are simultaneously raised on the same uniform scale, we know by repeated experience in many modes of display, whether in dress, in architecture, in the embellishment of rooms, etc., that this raising of the standard is not perceived with much vivacity, and that the feelings of the spectator are soon reconciled to alterations that are harmonized. It is always by some want of uniformity, some defect in following out the scale, that we become roused to conscious observation of the difference between this and our former standards. We exaggerate these differences in such a case as much as we undervalue them in a case where all is symmetrical. We might expect, therefore, beforehand, that the opposite characteristics as to style of Æschylus and Euripides would force themselves upon the notice of the Athenian populace; and, in fact, we learn from the Greek scholiasts on these poets that this effect did really follow. These scholiasts, indeed, belong to a later age. But we know by traditions which they have preserved, and we know from Aristotle himself, the immediate successor of the great tragic poets (indirectly we know also from the stormy ridicule of Aristophanes, who

may be viewed as contemporary with those poets), that Æschylus was notorious to a proverb amongst the very mob for the stateliness, pomp, and towering character of his diction, whilst Euripides was equally notorious not merely for a diction in a lower key, more household, more natural, less elaborate, but also for cultivating such a diction by study and deliberate preference. Having such great models of contrasting style to begin with, having the attention converged upon these differences by the furious merriment of Aristophanes, less than a Grecian wit would have felt a challenge in all this to the investigation of style, as a great organ of difference between man and man, between poet and poet.

5. But there was a more enduring reason in the circumstances of Greece for entitling us to expect from her the perfect theory of style. It lay in those accidents of time and place which obliged Greece to spin most of her speculations, like a spider, out of her own bowels. Now, for such a kind of literature style is, generally speaking, paramount; for a literature less self-evolved style is more liable to neglect. Modern nations have laboured under the very opposite disadvantage. The excess of external materials has sometimes oppressed their creative power, and sometimes their meditative power. The exuberance of *objective* knowledge — that knowledge which carries the mind to materials existing *out* of itself, such as natural philosophy, chemistry, physiology, astronomy, geology, where the mind of the student goes for little and the external object for much — has had the effect of weaning men from subjective speculation, where the mind is all in all and the alien object next to nothing, and in that degree has weaned them from the culture of style. Now, on the other hand, if you suppose a man in the situation of Baron

Trenck at Spandau, or Spinoza in the situation of Robinson Crusoe at Juan Fernandez, or a contemplative monk of the thirteenth century in his cell, you will perceive that — unless he were a poor feeble-minded creature like Cowper's Bastille prisoner, thrown by utter want of energy upon counting the very nails of his dungeon in all permutations and combinations — rather than quit the external world, he must in his own defence, were it only as a relief from gnawing thoughts, cultivate some *subjective* science; that is, some branch of knowledge which, drawing everything from the mind itself, is independent of external resources. Such a science is found in the relations of man to God, — that is in theology; in the determinations of space, — that is in geometry; in the relations of existence or being universally to the human mind, — otherwise called metaphysics or ontology; in the relations of the mind to itself, — otherwise called logic. Hence it was that the scholastic philosophy evolved itself, like a vast spider's loom, between the years 1100 and 1400. Men shut up in solitude, with the education oftentimes of scholars, with a life of leisure, but with hardly any books, and no means of observation, were absolutely forced, if they would avoid lunacy from energies unoccupied with any object, to create an object out of those very energies: they were driven by mere pressure of solitude, and sometimes of eternal silence, into raising vast aerial Jacob's ladders of vapoury metaphysics, just as endless as those meteorologic phenomena which technically bear that name, just as sublime and aspiring in their tendency upwards, and sometimes (but not always) just as unsubstantial. In this present world of the practical and the ponderable, we so little understand or value such abstractions, though once our British schoolmen took the lead in these subtleties, that we con-

found their very natures and names. Most people with us mean by metaphysics what is properly called psychology. Now, these two are so far from being the same thing that the former could be pursued (and, to say the truth, was, in fact, under Aristotle created) by the monk in his unfurnished cell, where nothing ever entered but moonbeams. Whereas psychology is but in part a subjective science; in some proportion it is also *objective*, depending on multiplied experience, or on multiplied records of experience. Psychology, therefore, *could* not have been cultivated extensively by the schoolmen, and in fact would not have been cultivated at all but for the precedent of Aristotle. He, who laid the foundation of their metaphysics, which have nothing to do with man, had also written a work on man,—viz. on the human soul,—besides other smaller works on particular psychological phenomena (such as dreaming). Hence, through mere imitation, arose the short sketches of psychology amongst the schoolmen. Else *their* vocation lay to metaphysics, as a science which can dance upon moonbeams; and that vocation arose entirely out of their circumstances,—solitude, scholarship, and no books. Total extinction there was for them of all objective materials, and therefore, as a consequence inevitable, reliance on the solitary energies of their own minds. Like Christabel's chamber lamp, and the angels from which it was suspended, all was the invention of the unprompted artist,—

“All made out of the carver's brain.”

Models he had none before him, for printed books were yet sleeping in futurity, and the gates of a grand asceticism were closed upon the world of life. We moderns, indeed, fancy that the necessities of the Romish Church — the

mere instincts of self-protection in Popery — were what offered the bounty on this air-woven philosophy ; and partly that is true ; but it is most certain that all the bounties in this world would have failed to operate effectually, had they not met with those circumstances in the silent life of monasteries which favoured the growth of such a self-spun metaphysical divinity. Monastic life predisposed the restlessness of human intellect to move in that direction. It was one of the few directions compatible with solitude and penury of books. It was the only one that opened an avenue at once to novelty and to freedom of thought. Now, then, precisely what the monastic life of the schoolmen was in relation to Philosophy, the Greece of Pericles had been in relation to Literature. What circumstances, what training, or predisposing influences existed for the monk in his cell, the same (or such as were tantamount) existed for the Grecian wit in the atmosphere of Athens. Three great agencies were at work, and unconsciously moulding the efforts of the earliest schoolmen about the opening of the Crusades, and of the latest sometime after their close ; — three analogous agencies, the same in virtue, though varied in circumstances, gave impulse and guidance to the men of Greece, from Pericles, at the opening of Greek literature, to Alexander of Macedon, who witnessed its second harvest. And these agencies were : — *1st*, Leisure in excess, with a teeming intellect ; the burden, under a new-born excitement, of having nothing to do. *2d*, Scarcity, without an absolute famine, of books ; enough to awake the dormant cravings, but not enough to gratify them without personal participation in the labours of intellectual creation. *3d*, A revolutionary restlessness, produced by the recent establishment of a new and growing public interest.

6. The two first of these agencies for stimulating intellects already roused by agitating changes are sufficiently obvious; though few perhaps are aware to what extent idleness prevailed in Pagan Greece, and even in Rome, under the system of household slavery, and under the bigoted contempt of commerce. But, waiving that point, and for the moment waiving also the degree of scarcity which affected books at the era of Pericles, we must say one word as to the two great analogous public interests which had formed themselves separately, and with a sense of revolutionary power, for the Greeks on the one hand, and for the schoolmen on the other. As respected the Grecians, and especially the Athenians, this excitement lay in the sentiment of nationality which had been first powerfully organized by the Persian War. Previously to that war the sentiment no doubt smouldered obscurely; but the oriental invasion it was which kindled it into a torrent of flame. And it is interesting to remark that the very same cause which fused and combined these scattered tribes into the unity of Hellas, viz. their common interest in making head against an awful invader, was also the cause which most of all separated them into local parties by individual rivalry and by characteristic services: The arrogant Spartan, mad with a French-like self-glorification, boasted for ever of his little Thermopylæ. Ten years earlier the far sublimer display of Athenian Marathon, to say nothing of after-services at Salamis or elsewhere, had placed Attica at the summit of the Greek family. No matter whether selfish jealousy would allow that pre-eminence to be recognized; doubtless it was felt. With this civic pre-eminence arose concurrently for Athens the development of an intellectual pre-eminence. On this we need say nothing. But even here, although the pre-eminence was too dazzling to have been at any time

overlooked, yet, with some injustice in every age to Athens, her light has been recognized, but not what gave it value, — the contrasting darkness of all around her. This did not escape Paterculus, whose understanding is always vigilant. “We talk,” says he, “of *Grecian* eloquence or *Grecian* poetry, when we should say *Attic*; for who has ever heard of Theban orators, of Lacedæmonian artists, or Corinthian poets?”<sup>1</sup> Æschylus, the first great author of Athens (for Herodotus was not Athenian), personally fought in the Persian War. Consequently the two modes of glory for Athens were almost of simultaneous emergence. And what we are now wishing to insist on is that precisely by and through this great unifying event, viz. the double inroad of Asia militant upon Greece, Greece first became generally and reciprocally known to Greece herself; that Greece was then first arranged and *cast*, as it were dramatically, according to her capacities, services, duties; that a general consciousness was then diffused of the prevailing relations in which each political family stood to the rest; and that in the leading states every intellectual citizen drew a most agitating excitement from the particular character of glory which had settled upon his own tribe, and the particular station which had developed upon it amongst the champions of civilization.

7. That was the *positive* force acting upon Athens. Now, reverting to the monkish schoolmen, in order to com-

<sup>1</sup> People will here remind us that Aristotle was half a foreigner, being born at Stagira in Macedon. Ay, but amongst Athenian emigrants, and of an Athenian father! His mother, we think, was Thracian. The crossing of races almost uniformly terminates in producing splendour, at any rate energy, of intellect. If the roll of great men, or at least of energetic men, in Christendom were carefully examined, it would astonish us to observe how many have been the children of mixed marriages, — *i.e.* of alliances between two bloods as to nation, although the races might originally have been the same. — DE Q.

plete the parallel, what was the corresponding force acting upon *them*? Leisure and want of books were accidents common to both parties,—to the scholastic age and to the age of Pericles. These were the *negative* forces, concurring with others to sustain a movement once begun, but incapable of giving the original impulse. What was the active, the *affirmative*, force which effected for the scholastic monks that unity and sense of common purposes which had been effected for the Greeks by the sudden development of a Grecian interest opposed to a Persian,—of a civilized interest, under sudden peril, opposed to the barbarism of the universal planet? What was there, for the race of monkish schoolmen labouring through three centuries, in the nature of a known palpable interest, which could balance so grand a principle of union and of effort as this acknowledged guardianship of civilization had suddenly unfolded, like a banner, for the Greeks during the infancy of Pericles?<sup>1</sup> What *could* there be of corresponding grandeur?

8. Beforehand, this should have seemed impossible: but, in reality, a far grander mode of interest had arisen for the schoolmen: grander, because more indefinite; more indefinite, because spiritual. It was this:—The Western or Latin Church had slowly developed her earthly power. As an edifice of civil greatness throughout the western world, she stood erect and towering. In the eleventh century, beyond all others, she had settled her deep foundations. The work thus far was complete; but blank civil

<sup>1</sup> It is well to give unity to our grandest remembrances by connecting them, as many as can be, with the same centre. Pericles died in the year 429 before Christ. Supposing his age to be fifty-six, he would then be born about 485 B.C., — that is, five years after the first Persian invasion under Darius, five years before the second under Xerxes.—DE Q.

power, though indispensable, was the feeblest of her arms, and, taken separately, was too frail to last, besides that it was liable to revolutions. The authority by which chiefly she ruled, had ruled, and hoped to rule, was spiritual; and, with the growing institutions of the age, embodying so much of future resistance, it was essential that this spiritual influence should be founded on a subtle philosophy, difficult to learn, difficult to refute; as also that many dogmas already established, such as tradition by way of prop to infallibility, should receive a far ampler development. The Latin Church, we must remember, was not yet that Church of Papal Rome, in the maturity of its doctrines and its pretensions, which it afterwards became. And, when we consider how vast a benefactress this Church had been to early Christendom when moulding and settling her foundations, as also in what light she must have appeared to her own pious children in centuries where as yet only the first local breezes of opposition had begun to whisper amongst the Albigenses, etc., we are bound in all candour to see that a sublimer interest could not have existed for any series of philosophers than the profound persuasion that by marrying metaphysics to divinity, two sciences even separately so grand, and by the pursuit of labyrinthine truth, they were building up an edifice reaching to the heavens, — the great spiritual fortress of the Catholic Church.

**9.** Here let us retrace the course of our speculations, lest the reader should suppose us to be wandering.

**10.** First, for the sake of illustrating more vividly the influences which acted on the Greece of Pericles, we bring forward another case analogously circumstanced, as moulded by the same causes: — 1. The same condition of intellect under revolutionary excitement; 2. The same penury of

books ; 3. The same chilling gloom from the absence of female charities,—the consequent reaction of that oppressive *ennui* which Helvetius fancied, amongst all human agencies, to be the most potent stimulant for the intellect ; 4. The same (though far different) enthusiasm and elevation of thought from disinterested participation in forwarding a great movement of the age : for the one side involving the glory of their own brilliant country and concurrent with civilization ; for the other, co-extensive with all spiritual truth and all spiritual power.

11. Next, we remark that men living permanently under such influences must, of mere necessity, resort to that order of intellectual pursuits which requires little aid *ab extra*, —that order, in fact, which philosophically is called “subjective,” as drawing much from our own proper selves, or little (if anything) from extraneous objects.

12. And then, thirdly, we remark that such pursuits are peculiarly favourable to the culture of style. In fact they force that culture. A man who has absolute facts to communicate from some branch of study external to himself, as physiology, suppose, or anatomy, or astronomy, is careless of style ; or at least he may be so, because he is independent of style, for what he has to communicate neither readily admits, nor much needs, any graces in the mode of communication ; the matter transcends and oppresses the manner. The matter tells without any manner at all. But he who has to treat a vague question, such as Cicero calls a *quæstio infinita*, where everything is to be finished out of his own peculiar feelings, or his own way of viewing things (in contradistinction to a *quæstio finita*, where determinate *data* from without already furnish the main materials), soon finds that the manner of treating it not only transcends the matter, but very often, and in a very great proportion,

is the matter. In very many subjective exercises of the mind,—as, for instance, in that class of poetry which has been formally designated by this epithet (meditative poetry, we mean, in opposition to the Homeric, which is intensely objective), the problem before the writer is to project his own inner mind; to bring out consciously what yet lurks by involution in many unanalyzed feelings; in short, to pass through a prism and radiate into distinct elements what previously had been even to himself but dim and confused ideas intermixed with each other. Now, in such cases, the skill with which detention or conscious arrest is given to the evanescent, external projection to what is internal, outline to what is fluxionary, and body to what is vague,—all this depends entirely on the command over language as the one sole means of embodying ideas; and in such cases the style, or, in the largest sense, *manner*, is confluent with the matter. But, at all events, even by those who are most impatient of any subtleties, or what they consider “metaphysical” distinctions, thus much must be conceded: viz. that those who rest upon external facts, tangible realities, and circumstantial details,—in short, generally upon the *objective*, whether in a case of narration or of argument,—must for ever be less dependent upon style than those who have to draw upon their own understandings and their own peculiar feelings for the furniture and matter of their composition. A single illustration will make this plain. It is an old remark, and, in fact, a subject of continual experience, that lawyers fail as public speakers in the House of Commons. Even Erskine, the greatest of modern advocates, was nobody as a senator; and the “fluent Murray,” two generations before him, had found his fluency give way under that mode of trial. But why? How was it possible that a man’s fluency in one chamber of public business

should thus suddenly be defeated and confounded in another? The reason is briefly expressed in Cicero's distinction between a *quæstio finita*<sup>1</sup> and a *quæstio infinita*.<sup>2</sup> In the courts of law, the orator was furnished with a brief, an abstract of facts, downright statements upon oath, circumstances of presumption, and, in short, a whole volume of topics external to his own mind. Sometimes, it is true, the advocate would venture a little out to sea *proprio marte*:<sup>3</sup> in a case of *crim. con.*, for instance, he would attempt a little picture of domestic happiness drawn from his own funds. But he was emboldened to do this from his certain knowledge that in the facts of his brief he had always a hasty retreat in case of any danger that he should founder. If the little picture prospered, it was well: if not, if symptoms of weariness began to arise in the audience, or of hesitation in himself, it was but to cut the matter short, and return to the *terra firma* of his brief, when all again was fluent motion. Besides that, each separate transition, and the distribution of the general subject, offered themselves spontaneously in a law case; the logic was given as well as the method. Very often the mere order of chronology dictated the succession and arrangement of the topics. Now, on the other hand, in a House of Commons oration, although sometimes there may occur statements of fact and operose calculations, still these are never more than a text, at the very best, for the political discussion, but often no more than a subsequent illustration or proof attached to some one of its heads. The main staple of any long speech must always be some general view of national policy; and, in Cicero's language, such a view must always be *infinita*; that is, not determined *ab extra*, but shaped

<sup>1</sup> [Definite matter.]

<sup>2</sup> [Vague or indeterminate matter.]

<sup>3</sup> [By his own bravery.]

and drawn from the funds of one's own understanding. The facts are here subordinate and ministerial ; in the case before a jury the facts are all in all. The forensic orator satisfies his duty if he does but take the facts exactly as they stand in his brief, and place them before his audience in that order, and even (if he should choose it) in those words. The parliamentary orator has no opening for facts at all, but as he himself may be able to create such an opening by some previous expositions of doctrine or opinion, of the probable or expedient. The one is always creeping along shore ; the other is always out at sea. Accordingly, the degrees of anxiety which severally affect the two cases are best brought to the test in this one question — “ *What shall I say next ?* ” — an anxiety besetting orators like that which besets poor men in respect to their children's daily bread. “ This moment it is secured ; but, alas for the next ! ” Now, the judicial orator finds an instant relief : the very points of the case are numbered ; and, if he cannot find more to say upon No. 7, he has only to pass on and call up No. 8. Whereas the deliberative orator, in a senate or a literary meeting, finds himself always in this situation, — that, having reached with difficulty that topic which we have supposed to be No. 7, one of three cases uniformly occurs : either he does not perceive any No. 8 at all ; or, secondly, he sees a distracting choice of No. 8's — the ideas to which he might next pass are many, but he does not see whither they will lead him ; or, thirdly, he sees a very fair and promising No. 8, but cannot in any way discover offhand how he is to effect a transition to this new topic. He cannot, with the rapidity requisite, modulate out of the one key into the other. His anxiety increases, utter confusion masters him, and he breaks down.

13. We have made this digression by way of seeking, in a well-known case of public life, an illustration of the difference between a subjective and an objective exercise of the mind. It is the sudden translation from the one exercise to the other which, and which only, accounts for the failure of advocates when attempting senatorial efforts. Once used to depend on memorials or briefs of facts, or of evidence not self-derived, the advocate, like a child in leading-strings, loses that command over his own internal resources which otherwise he might have drawn from practice. In fact, the advocate, with his brief lying before him, is precisely in the condition of a parliamentary speaker who places a written speech or notes for a speech in his hat. This trick has sometimes been practised; and the consternation which would befall the orator in the case of such a hat-speech being suddenly blown away precisely realizes the situation of a *nisi prius* orator when first getting on his legs in the House of Commons. He has swum with bladders all his life: suddenly he must swim without them.

14. This case explains why it is that all subjective branches of study favour the cultivation of style. Whatsoever is entirely independent of the mind, and external to it, is generally equal to its own enunciation. Ponderable facts and external realities are intelligible in almost any language: they are self-explained and self-sustained. But, the more closely any exercise of mind is connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities,—that is, with what is philosophically termed *subjective*,—precisely in that degree, and the more subtly, does the style or the embodying of the thoughts cease to be a mere separable ornament, and in fact the more does the manner, as we expressed it before, become confluent with the matter. In saying this, we do but vary the form of what we once

heard delivered on this subject by Mr. Wordsworth. His remark was by far the weightiest thing we ever heard on the subject of style; and it was this: that it is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction “the *dress* of thoughts.” And what was it then that he would substitute? Why, this: he would call it “the *incarnation* of thoughts.” Never in one word was so profound a truth conveyed. Mr. Wordsworth was thinking, doubtless, of poetry like his own: viz. that which is eminently meditative. And the truth is apparent on consideration: for, if language were merely a dress, then you could separate the two; you could lay the thoughts on the left hand, the language on the right. But, generally speaking, you can no more deal thus with poetic thoughts than you can with soul and body. The union is too subtle, the intertexture too ineffable,—each co-existing not merely *with* the other, but each *in* and *through* the other. An image, for instance, a single word, often enters into a thought as a constituent part. In short, the two elements are not united as a body with a separable dress, but as a mysterious incarnation. And thus, in what proportion the thoughts are subjective, in that same proportion does the very essence become identical with the expression, and the style become confluent with the matter.

15. The Greeks, by want of books, philosophical instruments, and innumerable other aids to all objective researches, being thrown more exclusively than we upon their own unaided minds, cultivated logic, ethics, metaphysics, psychology,—all thoroughly subjective studies. The schoolmen, in the very same situation, cultivated precisely the same field of knowledge. The Greeks, indeed, added to their studies that of geometry; for the inscription over the gate of the Academy (“Let no one enter who is not in-

structed in geometry ") sufficiently argues that this science must have made some progress in the days of Pericles, when it could thus be made a general qualification for admission to a learned establishment within thirty years after his death. But geometry is partly an objective, partly a subjective, study. With this exception, the Greeks and the Monastic Schoolmen trod the very same path.

16. Consequently, in agreement with our principle, both ought to have found themselves in circumstances favourable to the cultivation of style. And it is certain that they did. As an *art*, as a practice, it was felicitously pursued in both cases. It is true that the harsh ascetic mode of treating philosophy by the schoolmen generated a corresponding barrenness, aridity, and repulsiveness, in the rigid forms of their technical language. But, however offensive to genial sensibilities, this diction was a perfect thing in its kind ; and, to do it justice, we ought rather to compare it with the exquisite language of algebra, — equally irreconcilable to all standards of æsthetic beauty ; but yet, for the three qualities of elliptical rapidity (that rapidity which constitutes very much of what is meant by *elegance* in mathematics), of absolute precision, and of simplicity, this algebraic language is unrivalled amongst human inventions. On the other hand, the Greeks, whose objects did not confine them to these austere studies, carried out their corresponding excellence in style upon a far wider, and indeed a comprehensive, scale. Almost all modes of style were exemplified amongst *them*. Thus we endeavour to show that the subjective pursuits of the Greeks and the schoolmen ought to have favoured a command of appropriate diction ; and afterwards that it did.

17. But, *fourthly*, we are entitled to expect that, wherever style exists in great development as a practice, it will

soon be investigated with corresponding success as a theory. If fine music is produced spontaneously in short snatches by the musical sensibility of a people, it is a matter of certainty that the science of composition, that counterpoint, that thorough-bass, will soon be cultivated with a commensurate zeal. This is matter of such obvious inference that in any case where it fails we look for some extraordinary cause to account for it. Now, in Greece, with respect to style, the inference *did* fail. Style, as an art, was in a high state of culture; style, as a science, was nearly neglected. How is this to be accounted for? It arose naturally enough out of one great phenomenon in the condition of ancient times, and the relation which that bore to literature and to all human exertion of the intellect.

18. Did the reader ever happen to reflect on the great idea of *publication*? An idea we call it; because even in our own times, with all the mechanic aids of steam-presses, etc., this object is most imperfectly approached, and is destined, perhaps, for ever to remain an unattainable ideal, — useful (like all ideals) in the way of regulating our aims, but also as a practicable object not reconcilable with the limitation of human power. For it is clear that, if books were multiplied by a thousandfold, and truths of all kinds were carried to the very fireside of every family, — nay, placed below the eyes of every individual, — still the purpose of any universal publication would be defeated and utterly confounded, were it only by the limited opportunities of readers. One condition of publication defeats another. Even so much as a general publication is a hopeless idea. Yet, on the other hand, publication in some degree, and by some mode, is a *sine qua non* condition for the generation of literature. Without a larger sympathy than that of his own personal circle, it is evident that no writer

could have a motive for those exertions and previous preparations without which excellence is not attainable in any art whatsoever.

19. Now, in our own times, it is singular, and really philosophically curious, to remark the utter blindness of writers, readers, publishers, and all parties whatever interested in literature, as to the trivial fraction of publicity which settles upon each separate work. The very multiplication of books has continually defeated the object in growing progression. Readers have increased, the engines of publication have increased; but books, increasing in a still greater proportion, have left as the practical result an average quotient of publicity for each book, taken apart, continually decreasing. And, if the whole world were readers, probably the average publicity for each separate work would reach a *minimum*; such would be the concurrent increase of books. But even this view of the case keeps out of sight the most monstrous forms of this phenomenon. The inequality of the publication has the effect of keeping very many books absolutely without a reader. The majority of books are never opened; five hundred copies may be printed, or half as many more; of these it may happen that five are carelessly turned over. Popular journals, again, which carry a promiscuous miscellany of papers into the same number of hands, as a stage-coach must convey all its passengers at the same rate of speed, dupe the public with a notion that here at least all are read. Not at all. One or two are read from the interest attached to their subjects. Occasionally one is read a little from the ability with which it treats a subject not otherwise attractive. The rest have a better chance certainly than books, because they are at any rate placed under the eye and in the hand of readers. But this is no more than

a variety of the same case. A hasty glance may be taken by one in a hundred at the less attractive papers; but reading is out of the question. Then, again, another delusion, by which all parties disguise the truth, is the absurd belief that, not being read at present, a book may, however, be revived hereafter. Believe it not! This is possible only with regard to books that demand to be studied, where the merit is slowly discovered. Every month, every day indeed, produces its own novelties, with the additional zest that they *are* novelties. Every future year, which will assuredly fail in finding time for its own books,—how should it find time for defunct books? No, no; every year buries its own literature. Since Waterloo there have been added upwards of fifty thousand books and pamphlets to the shelves of our *native* literature, taking no account of foreign importations. Of these fifty thousand possibly two hundred still survive; possibly twenty will survive for a couple of centuries; possibly five or six thousand may have been indifferently read, the rest not so much as opened. In this hasty sketch of a calculation we assume a single copy to represent a whole edition. But, in order to have the total sum of copies numerically neglected since Waterloo, it will be requisite to multiply forty-four thousand by five hundred at the least, but probably by a higher multiplier. At the very moment of writing this—by way of putting into a brighter light the inconceivable blunder as to publicity habitually committed by sensible men of the world—let us mention what we now see before us in a public journal. Speaking with disapprobation of a just but disparaging expression applied to the French war-mania by a London morning paper, the writer has described it as likely to irritate the people of France. O genius of arithmetic! The offending London

journal has a circulation of four thousand copies daily; and it is assumed that thirty-three millions, of whom assuredly not twenty-five individuals will ever see the English paper as a visible object, nor five ever read the passage in question, are to be maddened by one word in a colossal paper laid this morning on a table amongst fifty others, and to-morrow morning pushed off that table by fifty others of more recent date. How are such delusions possible? Simply from the previous delusion, of ancient standing, connected with printed characters: what is printed seems to every man invested with some fatal character of publicity such as cannot belong to mere MS.; whilst, in the meantime, out of every thousand printed pages, one at the most, but at all events a very small proportion indeed, is in any true sense more public when printed than previously as a manuscript; and that one, even that thousandth part, perishes as effectually in a few days to each separate reader as the words perish in our daily conversation. Out of all that we talk, or hear others talk, through the course of a year, how much remains on the memory at the closing day of December? Quite as little, we may be sure, survives from most people's reading. A book answers its purpose by sustaining the intellectual faculties in motion through the current act of reading, and a general deposition or settling takes effect from the sum of what we read; even that, however, chiefly according to the previous condition in which the book finds us for understanding it, and referring them to heads under some existing arrangement of our knowledge. Publication is an idle term applied to what is not published; and nothing is *published* which is not made known *publicly* to the understanding as well as the eye; whereas, for the enormous majority of what is

printed, we cannot say so much as that it is made known to the eyes.

20. For what reason have we insisted on this unpleasant view of a phenomenon incident to the limitation of our faculties, and apparently without remedy? Upon another occasion it might have been useful to do so, were it only to impress upon every writer the vast importance of compression. Simply to retrench one word from each sentence, one superfluous epithet, for example, would probably increase the disposable time of the public by one twelfth part; in other words, would add another month to the year, or raise any sum of volumes read from eleven to twelve hundred. A mechanic operation would effect *that* change; but, by cultivating a closer logic and more severe habits of thinking, perhaps two sentences out of each three might be pruned away, and the amount of possible publication might thus be increased in a threefold degree. A most serious duty, therefore, and a duty which is annually growing in solemnity, appears to be connected with the culture of an unwordy diction; much more, however, with the culture of clear thinking,—that being the main key to good writing, and consequently to fluent reading.

21. But all this, though not unconnected with our general theme, is wide of our immediate purpose. The course of our logic at this point runs in the following order. The Athenians, from causes assigned, ought to have consummated the whole science and theory of style. But they did *not*. Why? Simply from a remarkable deflexion or bias given to their studies by a difficulty connected with *publication*. For some modes of literature the Greeks *had* a means of publication, for many they *had not*. That one difference, as we shall show, disturbed the just valuation of style.

22. Some mode of publication must have existed for Athens: that is evident. The mere *fact* of a literature proves it. For without public sympathy how can a literature arise? or public sympathy without a regular organ of publication? What poet would submit to the labours of his most difficult art, if he had no reasonable prospect of a large audience, and somewhat of a permanent audience, to welcome and adopt his productions?

23. Now then, in the Athens of Pericles, what *was* the audience, how composed, and how insured, on which the literary composer might rely? By what channel, in short, did the Athenian writer calculate on a *publication*? This is a very interesting question, and, as regards much in the civilization of Greece, both for what it caused and what it prevented, is an important question. In the elder days,—in fact we may suppose through the five hundred years from the Trojan expedition to Pisistratus and Solon,—all *publication* was effected through two classes of men: the public reciters and the public singers. Thus, no doubt, it was that the Iliad and Odyssey were sent down to the hands of Pisistratus, who has the traditional reputation of having first arranged and revised these poems. These reciters or singers to the harp would probably rehearse one entire book of the Iliad at every splendid banquet. Every book would be kept in remembrance and currency by the peculiar local relations of particular states or particular families to ancestors connected with Troy. This mode of publication, however, had the disadvantage that it was among the arts ministerial to sensual enjoyment. And it is some argument for the extensive diffusion of such a practice in the early times of Greece that, both in the Greece of later times, and, by adoption from her, in the Rome of cultivated ages, we find the *ἀκροαμάτα* as commonly established

by way of a dinner appurtenance — that is, exercises of display addressed to the ear, recitations of any kind with and without music — not at all less frequently than *όραματα*, or the corresponding display to the eye (dances or combats of gladiators). These were doubtless inheritances from the ancient usages of Greece, — modes of publication resorted to long before the Olympic Games by the mere necessitous cravings for sympathy, and kept up long after that institution, as in itself too brief and rare in its recurrence to satisfy the necessity.

24. Such was the earliest effort of publication, and in its feeble infancy ; for this, besides its limitation in point of audience, was confined to narrative poetry. But, when the ideal of Greece was more and more exalted by nearer comparison with barbarous standards, after the sentiment of patriotism had coalesced with vindictive sentiments, and when towering cities began to reflect the grandeur of this land as in a visual mirror, these cravings for publicity became more restless and irrepressible. And at length, in the time of Pericles, concurrently with the external magnificence of the city, arose for Athens two modes of publication, each upon a scale of gigantic magnitude.

25. What were these ? The *Theatre* and the *Agora* or *Forum* : publication by the Stage, and publication by the Hustings. These were the extraordinary modes of publication which arose for Athens : one by a sudden birth, like that of Minerva, in the very generation of Pericles ; the other slowly maturing itself from the generation of Pisistratus, which preceded that of Pericles by a hundred years. This double publication, scenic and forensic, was virtually, and for all the loftier purposes of publication, the press of Athens. And, however imperfect a representative this may seem of a typographical publication, certain it is that

in some important features the Athenian publication had separate advantages of its own. It was a far more effective and correct publication in the first place, enjoying every aid of powerful accompaniment from voice, gesture, scenery, music, and suffering in no instance from false reading or careless reading. Then, secondly, it was a far wider publication: each drama being read (or heard, which is a far better thing) by 25,000 or 30,000 persons, counterbalancing at least forty editions such as we on an average publish; each oration being delivered with just emphasis to perhaps 7000. But why, in this mention of a stage or hustings publication, as opposed to a publication by the printing-press, why was it, we are naturally admonished to ask, that the Greeks had no press? The ready answer will be, — because the art of printing had not been discovered. But that is an error, the detection of which we owe to the present Archbishop of Dublin. The art of printing *was* discovered. It had been discovered repeatedly. The art which multiplied the legends upon a coin or medal (a work which the ancients performed by many degrees better than we moderns, — for we make it a mechanic art, they a fine art) had in effect anticipated the art of printing. It was an art, this typographic mystery, which awoke and went back to sleep many times over from mere defect of materials. Not the defect of typography as an art, but the defect of *paper* as a material for keeping this art in motion, — *there* lay the reason, as Dr. Whately most truly observes, why printed books had no existence amongst the Greeks of Pericles, or afterwards amongst the Romans of Cicero. And why was there no paper? The common reason applying to both countries was the want of linen rags, and that want arose from the universal habit of wearing woollen garments. In this respect Athens and Rome were on the

same level. But for Athens the want was driven to a further extremity by the slenderness of her commerce with Egypt, whence only any substitute could have been drawn.

26. Even for Rome itself the scarcity of paper ran through many degrees. Horace, the poet, was amused with the town of Equotuticum for two reasons: as incapable of entering into hexameter verse from its prosodial quantity (*versu quod dicere non cst*); and because it purchased water (*vænit vilissima rerum aqua*), — a circumstance in which it agrees with the well-known Clifton, above the hot wells of Bristol, where water is bought by the shilling's worth. But neither Horatian Equotuticum nor Bristolian Clifton can ever have been as “hard up” for water as the Mecca caravan. And the differences were as great in respect to the want of paper between the Athens of Pericles or Alexander and the Rome of Augustus Cæsar. Athens had bad poets, whose names have come down to modern times; but Athens could no more have afforded to punish bad authors by sending their works to grocers —

“In vicum vendentem pus et odores,  
Et piper, et quicquid *chartis amicitur inepti*”<sup>1</sup> —

than London, because gorged with the wealth of two Indies, can afford to pave her streets with silver. This practice of applying unsalable authors to the ignoble uses of retail dealers in petty articles must have existed in Rome for some time before it could have attracted the notice of Horace, and upon some considerable scale as a known public

<sup>1</sup> [“Down to the street where spice and pepper's sold,  
And all the wares waste paper's used to fold.”]

— HORACE: Epistles. Conington's translation.]

usage before it could have roused any echoes of public mirth as a satiric allusion, or have had any meaning and sting.

27. In that one revelation of Horace we see a proof how much paper had become more plentiful. It is true that so long as men dressed in woollen materials it was impossible to look for a *cheap* paper. Maga might have been printed at Rome very well for ten guineas a copy. Paper was dear, undoubtedly, but it could be had. On the other hand, how desperate must have been the bankruptcy at Athens in all materials for receiving the record of thoughts, when we find a polished people having no better tickets or cards for conveying their sentiments to the public than shells! Thence came the very name for civil banishment, viz. *ostracism*, because the votes were marked on an *ostracon*, or marine shell. Again, in another great city, viz. Syracuse, you see men reduced to *petalism*, or marking their votes by the petals of shrubs. Elsewhere, as indeed many centuries nearer to our own times in Constantinople, bull's hide was used for the same purpose.

28. Well might the poor Greeks adopt the desperate expedient of white plastered walls as the best memorandum-book for a man who had thoughts occurring to him in the night-time. Brass only, or marble, could offer any lasting memorial for thoughts; and upon what material the parts were written out for the actors on the Athenian stage, or how the elaborate revisals of the text could be carried on, is beyond our power of conjecture.

29. In this appalling state of embarrassment for the great poet or prose writer, what consequences would naturally arise? A king's favourite and friend like Aristotle might command the most costly materials. For instance, if you look back, from this day to 1800, into the advertising records or catalogues of great Parisian publishers, you will

find more works of excessive luxury, costing from a thousand *francs* for each copy all the way up to as many *guineas*, in each separate period of fifteen years than in the whole forty among the wealthier and more enterprising publishers of Great Britain. What is the explanation? Can the very moderate incomes of the French gentry afford to patronize works which are beyond the purses of our British aristocracy, who, besides, are so much more of a reading class? Not so: the patronage for these Parisian works of luxury is not domestic, it is exotic: chiefly from the emperors and kings; from great national libraries; from rich universities; from the grandes of Russia, Hungary, or Great Britain; and generally from those who, living in splendid castles or hotels, require corresponding furniture, and therefore corresponding books, because to such people books are necessarily furniture,—since, upon the principles of good taste, they must correspond with the splendour of all around them. And in the age of Alexander there were already purchasers enough among royal houses, or the imitators of such houses, to encourage costly copies of attractive works. Aristotle was a privileged man. But in other less favoured cases the strong yearnings for public sympathy were met by blank impossibilities. Much martyrdom, we feel assured, was then suffered by poets. Thousands, it is true, perish in our days, who have never had a solitary reader. But still the existence *in print* gives a delusive feeling that they *may* have been read. They are standing in the market all day, and somebody, unperceived by themselves, may have thrown an eye upon their wares. The thing is possible. But for the ancient writer there was a sheer physical impossibility that any man should sympathize with what he never could have seen, except under the two conditions we have mentioned.

30. These two cases there were of exemption from this dire physical resistance, — two conditions which made publication possible ; and, under the horrible circumstances of sequestration for authors in general, need it be said that to benefit by either advantage was sought with such a zeal as, in effect, extinguished all other literature ? If a man could be a poet for the stage, a *scriptor scenicus*, in that case he was published. If a man could be admitted as an orator, as a regular *demagogus*, upon the popular *bema* or hustings, in that case he was published. If his own thoughts were a torment to him, until they were reverberated from the hearts and flashing eyes and clamorous sympathy of a multitude, thus only an outlet was provided, a mouth was opened, for the volcano surging within his brain. The vast theatre was an organ of publication ; the political forum was an organ of publication. And on this twofold arena a torch was applied to that inflammable gas which exhaled spontaneously from so excitable a mind as the mind of the Athenian.

31. Need we wonder, then, at the torrent-like determination with which Athenian literature, from the era 444 B.C. to the era 333 B.C., ran headlong into one or other channel, — the scenical poetry or the eloquence of the hustings ? For an Athenian in search of popular applause or of sympathy there was no other avenue to either ; unless, indeed, in the character of an artist, or of a leading soldier : but too often, in this latter class, it happened that mercenary foreigners had a preference. And thus it was that, during that period when the popular cast of government throughout Greece awakened patriotic emulation, scarcely anything is heard of in literature (allowing for the succession to philosophic chairs, which made it their pride to be private and exclusive) except dramatic poetry on the

one hand, comic or tragic, and political oratory on the other.

32. As to this last avenue to the public ear, how it was abused, in what excess it became the nuisance and capital scourge of Athens, there needs only the testimony of all contemporary men who happened to stand aloof from that profession, or all subsequent men even of that very profession who were not blinded by some corresponding interest in some similar system of delusion. Euripides and Aristophanes, contemporary with the earliest practitioners of name and power on the stage of jugglers, are overrun with expressions of horror for these public pests. "You have every qualification," says Aristophanes to an aspirant, "that could be wished for a public orator: *φωνὴ μιάρα*—a voice like seven devils; *κακὸς γεγονας*—you are by nature a scamp; *ἀγοραῖος εἰ*—you are up to snuff in the business of the forum." From Euripides might be gathered a small volume, relying merely upon so much of his works as yet survives, in illustration of the horror which possessed him for this gang of public misleaders:—

*Tout' ἔσθ' δὲ θυητῶν εὐ πολεῖς οἰκουμενᾶς  
Δομοὺς τέ ἀπολλυτέ —οἱ καλοὶ λιαν λογοι.*

33. "This is what overthrows cities admirably organized, and the households of men,— your superfine harangues." Cicero, full four centuries later, looking back to this very period from Pericles to Alexander, friendly as he was by the *esprit de corps* to the order of orators, and professionally biassed to uphold the civil uses of eloquence, yet, as an honest man, cannot deny that it was this gift of oratory, hideously abused, which led to the overthrow of Athens and the ruin of Grecian liberty: "Illa vetus Græcia, quæ quondam opibus, imperio, gloria floruit, hoc uno malo con-

cidit, — *libertate immoderata ac licentia concionum.*<sup>1</sup> Quintilian, standing on the very same ground of professional prejudice, all in favour of public orators, yet is forced into the same sorrowful confession. In one of the Declamations ascribed to him he says, “Civitatum status scimus ab oratoribus esse conversos”;<sup>2</sup> and in illustration he adds the example of Athens: “sive illam Atheniensium civitatem (quandam late principem) intueri placeat, accisas ejus vires animadvertemus *vicio concionantium.*”<sup>3</sup> Root and branch, Athens was laid prostrate by her wicked Radical orators; for Radical, in the elliptic phrase of modern politics, they were almost to a man; and in this feature above all others (a feature often scornfully exposed by Euripides) those technically known as *oi λεγοντες*, the speaking men, and as *oi δημαγωγοι*,<sup>4</sup> the misleaders of the mob, offer a most suitable ancestry for the modern leaders of Radicalism,—that with their base, fawning flatteries of the people they mixed up the venom of vipers against their opponents and against the aristocracy of the land.

‘Τπογλυκαινεν βηματιοι μαγειρικοι—

“subtly to wheedle the people with honeyed words dressed to its palate”: this had been the ironical advice of the scoffing Aristophanes. That practice made the mob orator

<sup>1</sup> [Ancient Greece, which in former time flourished in wealth, empire and glory, came to grief through this one evil—immoderate freedom and license of speech.]

<sup>2</sup> [The security of states we know is overturned by orators.]

<sup>3</sup> [Should it be pleasing to examine that Athenian state, everywhere known as the certain chief of nations, we submit that its strength was sapped by the vicious practice of haranguing.]

<sup>4</sup> With respect to the word “demagogues,” as a technical designation for the political orators and partisans at Athens (otherwise called *oi προσταται*, those who headed any movement), it is singular that so accurate a Greek scholar as Henry Stephens should have supposed *linguas promptas ad plebem*

contemptible to manly tastes, rather than hateful. But the sacrifice of independence—the “pride which licks the dust”—is the readiest training for all uncharitableness and falsehood towards those who seem either rivals for the same base purposes, or open antagonists for nobler. And, accordingly, it is remarked by Euripides that these pestilient abusers of the popular confidence would bring a mischief upon Athens before they had finished, equally by their sycophancies to the mob and by their libels of foreign princes. Hundreds of years afterwards, a Greek writer, upon reviewing this most interesting period of one hundred and eleven years, from Pericles to Alexander, sums up and repeats the opinion of Euripides in this general representative portrait of Attic oratory, with respect to which we wish to ask, Can any better delineation be given of a Chartist, or generically of a modern Jacobin? — ‘Ο δημαγωγος κακοδιδασκαλει τους πολλους, λεγων τα κεχαρισμενα — “The mob-leader dupes the multitude with false doctrines, whilst delivering things soothing to their credulous vanity.” This is one half of his office,—sycophancy to the immediate purse-holders, and poison to the sources of truth; the other half is expressed with the same spirit of prophecy as regards the British future, και διαβολαις αυτους ἔξαλλοτριοι προς τους ἀριστους,—“and by lying calumnies he utterly alienates them in relation to their own native aristocracy.”

34. Now this was a base pursuit, though somewhat relieved by the closing example of Demosthenes, who, amidst much frailty, had a generous nature; and he showed it *concitandum* (an expression of Livy's) *potius των δημαγωγων fruisse quam των ἡγητορων*; as if the demagogues were a separate class from the popular orators. But, says Valckenaer, the relation is soon stated: not all the Athenian orators were demagogues, but all the demagogues were in fact, and technically **were** called, orators.—DE Q.

chiefly by his death, and in his lifetime, to use Milton's words, by uttering many times "odious truth," which, with noble courage, he compelled the mob to hear. But one man could not redeem a national dishonour. It *was* such, and such it was felt to be. Men, therefore, of elevated natures, and men of gentle pacific natures, equally revolted from a trade of lies, as regarded the audience, and of strife, as regarded the competitors. There remained the one other pursuit of scenical poetry; and it hardly needs to be said what crowding there was amongst all the energetic minds of Athens into one or other of these pursuits: the one for the unworldly and idealizing, the other for the coarsely ambitious. These, therefore, became the two *quasi* professions of Athens, and at the same time, in a sense more exclusive than can now be true of *our* professions, became the sole means of publication for truth of any class, and a publication by many degrees more certain, more extensive, and more immediate, than ours by the press.

35. The Athenian theatre published an edition of thirty thousand copies in one day, enabling, in effect, every male citizen capable of attending, from the age of twenty to sixty, together with many thousands of domiciled aliens, to read the drama, with the fullest understanding of its sense and poetic force that could be effected by natural powers of voice and action, combined with all possible auxiliaries of art, of music, of pantomimic dancing, and the whole carried home to the heart by visible and audible sympathy in excess. This, but in a very inferior form as regarded the adjuncts of art, and the scale of the theatre, and the *mise en scène*, was precisely the advantage of Charles I. for appreciating Shakspere.

36. It was a standing reproach of the Puritans, adopted even by Milton, a leaden shaft feathered and made buoyant

by *his* wit, that the King had adopted that stage poet as the companion of his closet retirements. So it would have been a pity if these malignant persecutors of the royal solitude should have been liars as well as fanatics. Doubtless, even when king, and in his afflictions, this storm-vexed man did read Shakspere. But that was not the original way in which he acquired his acquaintance with the poet. A Prince of Wales, what between public claims and social claims, finds little time for reading after the period of childhood,—that is, at any period when he can comprehend a great poet. And it was as Prince of Wales that Charles prosecuted his studies of Shakspere. He saw continually at Whitehall, personated by the best actors of the time, illustrated by the stage management, and assisted by the mechanic displays of Inigo Jones, all the principal dramas of Shakspere actually performed. That was publication with an Athenian advantage. A thousand copies of a book may be brought into public libraries, and not one of them opened. But the three thousand copies of a play which Drury Lane used to publish in one night were in the most literal sense as well as in spirit read,—properly punctuated by the speakers, made intelligible by voice and action endowed with life and emphasis: in short, on each successive performance, a very large edition of a fine tragedy was published in the most impressive sense of publication,—not merely with accuracy, but with a mimic reality that forbade all forgetting, and was liable to no inattention.

37. Now, if Drury Lane published a drama for Shakspere by three thousand copies in one night, the Athenian theatre published ten times that amount for Sophocles. And this mode of publication in Athens, not co-operating (as in modern times) with other modes, but standing out

in solitary conspicuous relief, gave an artificial bounty upon that one mode of poetic composition, as the hustings did upon one mode of prose composition. And those two modes, being thus cultivated to the utter exclusion of others which did not benefit by that bounty of publication, gave an unnatural bias to the national style, determined in effect upon too narrow a scale the operative ideal of composition, and finally made the dramatic artist and the mob orator the two sole intellectual professions for Athens. Hence came a great limitation of style in practice; and hence, secondly, for reasons connected with these two modes of composition, a general neglect of style as a didactic theory.

# HERBERT SPENCER

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF STYLE<sup>1</sup>

### PART I

#### CAUSES OF FORCE IN LANGUAGE WHICH DEPEND UPON ECONOMY OF THE MENTAL ENERGIES

##### I.—THE PRINCIPLE OF ECONOMY APPLIED TO WORDS

1. COMMENTING on the seeming incongruity between his father's argumentative powers and his ignorance of formal logic, Tristram Shandy says :—“ It was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor, and two or three fellows of that learned society, that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools, should be able to work after that fashion with them.” Sterne’s intended implication that a knowledge of the principles of reasoning neither makes, nor is essential to, a good reasoner, is doubtless true. Thus, too, is it with grammar. As Dr. Latham, condemning the usual school-drill in Lindley Murray, rightly remarks :—“ Gross vulgarity is a fault to be prevented ; but the proper prevention is to be got from habit — not rules.” Similarly, there can be little question that good composition is far less dependent upon acquaintance with its laws, than upon practice and natural aptitude. A clear head, a quick imagination, and a sensitive ear, will go far towards making all rhetorical precepts needless.

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1852.

He who daily hears and reads well-framed sentences, will naturally more or less tend to use similar ones. And where there exists any mental idiosyncrasy — where there is a deficient verbal memory, or an inadequate sense of logical dependence, or but little perception of order, or a lack of constructive ingenuity; no amount of instruction will remedy the defect. Nevertheless, *some* practical result may be expected from a familiarity with the principles of style. The endeavour to conform to laws may tell, though slowly. And if in no other way, yet, as facilitating revision, a knowledge of the thing to be achieved — a clear idea of what constitutes a beauty, and what a blemish — cannot fail to be of service.

2. No general theory of expression seems yet to have been enunciated. The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric, are presented in an unorganized form. Standing as isolated dogmas — as empirical generalizations, they are neither so clearly apprehended, nor so much respected, as they would be were they deduced from some simple first principle. We are told that “brevity is the soul of wit.” We hear styles condemned as verbose or involved. Blair says that every needless part of a sentence “interrupts the description and clogs the image;” and again, that “long sentences fatigue the reader’s attention.” It is remarked by Lord Kaines, that “to give the utmost force to a period, it ought, if possible, to be closed with the word that makes the greatest figure.” That parentheses should be avoided and that Saxon words should be used in preference to those of Latin origin, are established precepts. But, however influential the truths thus dogmatically embodied, they would be much more influential if reduced to something like scientific ordination. In this, as in other cases, conviction will be greatly

strengthened when we understand the *why*. And we may be sure that a comprehension of the general principle from which the rules of composition result, will not only bring them home to us with greater force, but will discover to us other rules of like origin.

3. On seeking for some clue to the law underlying these current maxims, we may see shadowed forth in many of them, the importance of economizing the reader's or hearer's attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum towards which most of the rules above quoted point. When we condemn writing that is wordy or confused, or intricate — when we praise this style as easy, and blame that as fatiguing, we consciously or unconsciously assume this desideratum as our standard of judgment. Regarding language as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought, we may say that, as in a mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced. In either case, whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result. A reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available. To recognize and interpret the symbols presented to him, requires part of this power; to arrange and combine the images suggested requires a further part; and only that part which remains can be used for realizing the thought conveyed. Hence, the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived.

4. How truly language must be regarded as a hindrance to thought, though the necessary instrument of it, we shall clearly perceive on remembering the comparative force

with which simple ideas are communicated by signs. To say, "Leave the room," is less expressive than to point to the door. Placing a finger on the lips is more forcible than whispering, "Do not speak." A beck of the hand is better than, "Come here." No phrase can convey the idea of surprise so vividly as opening the eyes and raising the eyebrows. A shrug of the shoulders would lose much by translation into words. Again, it may be remarked that when oral language is employed, the strongest effects are produced by interjections, which condense entire sentences into syllables. And in other cases, where custom allows us to express thoughts by single words, as in *Beware*, *Heigho*, *Fudge*, much force would be lost by expanding them into specific propositions. Hence, carrying out the metaphor that language is the vehicle of thought, there seems reason to think that in all cases the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief, if not the sole thing to be done, is, to reduce this friction and inertia to the smallest possible amount. Let us then inquire whether economy of the recipient's attention is not the secret of effect, alike in the right choice and collocation of words, in the best arrangement of clauses in a sentence, in the proper order of its principal and subordinate propositions, in the judicious use of simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech, and even in the rhythmical sequence of syllables.

5. The greater forcibleness of Saxon English, or rather non-Latin English, first claims our attention. The several special reasons assignable for this may all be reduced to the general reason—economy. The most important of them is early association. A child's vocabulary is almost wholly Saxon. He says, *I have*, not *I possess*—*I wish*, not *I desire*; he does not *reflect*, he *thinks*; he does not

beg for *amusement*, but for *play*; he calls things *nice* or *nasty*, not *pleasant* or *disagreeable*. The synonyms which he learns in after years, never become so closely, so organically connected with the ideas signified, as do these original words used in childhood; and hence the association remains less strong. But in what does a strong association between a word and an idea differ from a weak one? Simply in the greater ease and rapidity of the suggestive action. It can be in nothing else. Both of two words, if they be strictly synonymous, eventually call up the same image. The expression — It is *acid*, must in the end give rise to the same thought as — It is *sour*; but because the term *acid* was learnt later in life, and has not been so often followed by the thought symbolized, it does not so readily arouse that thought as the term *sour*. If we remember how slowly and with what labour the appropriate ideas follow unfamiliar words in another language, and how increasing familiarity with such words brings greater rapidity and ease of comprehension; and if we consider that the same process must have gone on with the words of our mother tongue from childhood upwards, we shall clearly see that the earliest learnt and oftenest used words will, other things equal, call up images with less loss of time and energy than their later learnt synonyms.

6. The further superiority possessed by Saxon English in its comparative brevity, obviously comes under the same generalization. If it be an advantage to express an idea in the smallest number of words, then will it be an advantage to express it in the smallest number of syllables. If circuitous phrases and needless expletives distract the attention and diminish the strength of the impression produced, then do surplus articulations do so. A certain effort, though commonly an inappreciable one, must be

required to recognize every vowel and consonant. If, as all know, it is tiresome to listen to an indistinct speaker, or read a badly-written manuscript; and if, as we cannot doubt, the fatigue is a cumulative result of the attention needed to catch successive syllables; it follows that attention is in such cases absorbed by each syllable. And if this be true when the syllables are difficult of recognition, it will also be true, though in a less degree, when the recognition of them is easy. Hence, the shortness of Saxon words becomes a reason for their greater force. | One qualification, however, must not be overlooked. A word which in itself embodies the most important part of the idea to be conveyed, especially when that idea is an emotional one, may often with advantage be a polysyllabic word. Thus it seems more forcible to say, “It is *magnificent*,” than “It is *grand*.” The word *vast* is not so powerful a one as *stupendous*. Calling a thing *nasty* is not so effective as calling it *disgusting*.

7. There seem to be several causes for this exceptional superiority of certain long words. We may ascribe it partly to the fact that a voluminous, mouth-filling epithet is, by its very size, suggestive of largeness or strength; witness the immense pomposity of sesquipedalian verbiage: and when great power or intensity has to be suggested, this association of ideas aids the effect. A further cause may be that a word of several syllables admits of more emphatic articulation; and as emphatic articulation is a sign of emotion, the unusual impressiveness of the thing named is implied by it. Yet another cause is that a long word (of which the latter syllables are generally inferred as soon as the first are spoken) allows the hearer's consciousness a longer time to dwell upon the quality predicated; and where, as in the above cases, it is to this

predicated quality that the entire attention is called, an advantage results from keeping it before the mind for an appreciable time. The reasons which we have given for preferring short words evidently do not hold here. So that to make our generalization quite correct we must say, that while in certain sentences expressing strong feeling, the word which more especially implies that feeling may often with advantage be a many-syllabled or Latin one; in the immense majority of cases, each word serving but as a step to the idea embodied by the whole sentence, should, if possible, be a one-syllabled or Saxon one.

8. Once more, that frequent cause of strength in Saxon and other primitive words—their imitative character, may be similarly resolved into the more general cause. Both those directly imitative, as *splash*, *bang*, *whiz*, *roar*, etc., and those analogically imitative, as *rough*, *smooth*, *keen*, *blunt*, *thin*, *hard*, *crag*, etc., have a greater or less likeness to the things symbolized; and by making on the senses impressions allied to the ideas to be called up, they save part of the effort needed to call up such ideas, and leave more attention for the ideas themselves.

9. The economy of the recipient's mental energy, into which are thus resolvable the several causes of the strength of Saxon English, may equally be traced in the superiority of specific over generic words. That concrete terms produce more vivid impressions than abstract ones, and should, when possible, be used instead, is a current maxim of composition. As Dr. Campbell says, "The more general the terms are, the picture is the fainter; the more special they are, the brighter." We should avoid such a sentence as :

In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of their penal code will be severe.

And in place of it we should write :

In proportion as men delight in battles, bull-fights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack.

**10.** This superiority of specific expressions is clearly due to a saving of the effort required to translate words into thoughts. As we do not think in generals but in particulars — as, whenever any class of things is referred to, we represent it to ourselves by calling to mind individual members of it; it follows that when an abstract word is used, the hearer or reader has to choose from his stock of images, one or more, by which he may figure to himself the genus mentioned. In doing this, some delay must arise — some force be expended; and if, by employing a specific term, an appropriate image can be at once suggested, an economy is achieved, and a more vivid impression produced.

**11.** Turning now from the choice of words to their sequence, we shall find the same general principle hold good. We have *à priori* reasons for believing that in every sentence there is some one order of words more effective than any other; and that this order is the one which presents the elements of the proposition in the succession in which they may be most readily put together. As in a narrative, the events should be stated in such sequence that the mind may not have to go backwards and forwards in order to rightly connect them; as in a group of sentences, the arrangement should be such, that each of them may be understood as it comes, without waiting for subsequent ones; so in every sentence, the sequence of words should be that which suggests the constituents of the thought in the order most convenient for the building up that thought. Duly to enforce this truth, and to prepare the way for applications of it, we must briefly inquire into the mental

act by which the meaning of a series of words is apprehended.

12. We cannot more simply do this than by considering the proper collocation of the substantive and adjective. Is it better to place the adjective before the substantive, or the substantive before the adjective? Ought we to say with the French — *un cheval noir*; or to say as we do — a black horse? Probably, most persons of culture would decide that one order is as good as the other. Alive to the bias produced by habit, they would ascribe to that the preference they feel for our own form of expression. They would expect those educated in the use of the opposite form to have an equal preference for that. And thus they would conclude that neither of these instinctive judgments is of any worth. There is, however, a philosophical ground for deciding in favour of the English custom. If “a horse black” be the arrangement, immediately on the utterance of the word “horse,” there arises, or tends to arise, in the mind, a picture answering to that word; and as there has been nothing to indicate what *kind* of horse, any image of a horse suggests itself. Very likely, however, the image will be that of a brown horse: brown horses being the most familiar. The result is that when the word “black” is added, a check is given to the process of thought. Either the picture of a brown horse already present to the imagination has to be suppressed, and the picture of a black one summoned in its place; or else, if the picture of a brown horse be yet unformed, the tendency to form it has to be stopped. Whichever is the case, a certain amount of hindrance results. But if, on the other hand, “a black horse” be the expression used, no such mistake can be made. The word “black,” indicating an abstract quality, arouses no definite idea. It simply pre-

pares the mind for conceiving some object of that colour; and the attention is kept suspended until that object is known. If, then, by the precedence of the adjective, the idea is conveyed without liability to error, whereas the precedence of the substantive is apt to produce a misconception; it follows that the one gives the mind less trouble than the other, and is therefore more forcible.

13. Possibly it will be objected that the adjective and substantive come so close together, that practically they may be considered as uttered at the same moment; and that on hearing the phrase, "a horse black," there is not time to imagine a wrongly-coloured horse before the word "black" follows to prevent it. It must be owned that it is not easy to decide by introspection whether this is so or not. But there are facts collaterally implying that it is not. Our ability to anticipate the words yet unspoken is one of them. If the ideas of the hearer kept considerably behind the expressions of the speaker, as the objection assumes, he could hardly foresee the end of a sentence by the time it was half delivered: yet this constantly happens. Were the supposition true, the mind, instead of anticipating, would be continually falling more and more in arrear. If the meanings of words are not realized as fast as the words are uttered, then the loss of time over each word must entail such an accumulation of delays as to leave a hearer entirely behind. But whether the force of these replies be or be not admitted, it will scarcely be denied that the right formation of a picture will be facilitated by presenting its elements in the order in which they are wanted; even though the mind should do nothing until it has received them all.

14. What is here said respecting the succession of the adjective and substantive is obviously applicable, by change

of terms, to the adverb and verb. And without further explanation, it will be manifest, that in the use of prepositions and other particles, most languages spontaneously conform with more or less completeness to this law.

15. On applying a like analysis to the larger divisions of a sentence, we find not only that the same principle holds good, but that the advantage of respecting it becomes marked. In the arrangement of predicate and subject, for example, we are at once shown that as the predicate determines the aspect under which the subject is to be conceived, it should be placed first; and the striking effect produced by so placing it becomes comprehensible. Take the often-quoted contrast between — “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” and — “Diana of the Ephesians is great.” When the first arrangement is used, the utterance of the word “great” arouses those vague associations of an impressive nature with which it has been habitually connected; the imagination is prepared to clothe with high attributes whatever follows; and when the words, “Diana of the Ephesians,” are heard, all the appropriate imagery which can, on the instant, be summoned, is used in the formation of the picture: the mind being thus led directly, and without error, to the intended impression. When, on the contrary, the reverse order is followed, the idea, “Diana of the Ephesians,” is conceived with no special reference to greatness; and when the words, “is great,” are added, the conception has to be remodelled: whence arises a loss of mental energy, and a corresponding diminution of effect. The following verse from Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner,” though somewhat irregular in structure, well illustrates the same truth:

“*Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.*”

16. Of course the principle equally applies when the predicate is a verb or a participle. And as effect is gained by placing first all words indicating the quality, conduct, or condition of the subject, it follows that the copula also should have precedence. It is true, that the general habit of our language resists this arrangement of predicate, copula, and subject; but we may readily find instances of the additional force gained by conforming to it. Thus in the line from "Julius Cæsar" —

"Then burst this mighty heart,"

priority is given to a word embodying both predicate and copula. In a passage contained in "The Battle of Flodden Field," the like order is systematically employed with great effect :

"The Border slogan rent the sky !  
*A Home! a Gordon!* was the cry ;  
*Loud were* the clanging blows :  
*Advanced,—forced back,—now low, now high,*  
 The pennon sunk and rose ;  
 As bends the bark's mast in the gale  
 When rent are rigging, shrouds, and sail,  
 It wavered 'mid the foes."

17. Pursuing the principle yet further, it is obvious that for producing the greatest effect, not only should the main divisions of a sentence observe this sequence, but the subdivisions of these should be similarly arranged. In nearly all cases, the predicate is accompanied by some limit or qualification called its complement. Commonly, also, the circumstances of the subject, which form its complement, have to be specified. And as these qualifications and circumstances must determine the mode in which the acts and things they belong to are conceived, precedence should be given to them. Lord Kaines notices the

fact that this order is preferable; though without giving the reason. He says:—“When a circumstance is placed at the beginning of the period, or near the beginning, the transition from it to the principal subject is agreeable: is like ascending or going upward.” A sentence arranged in illustration of this will be desirable. Here is one:

Whatever it may be in theory, it is clear that in practice the French idea of liberty is — the right of every man to be master of the rest.

In this case, were the first two clauses, up to the word “practice” inclusive, which qualify the subject, to be placed at the end instead of the beginning, much of the force would be lost; as thus:

The French idea of liberty is — the right of every man to be master of the rest; in practice at least, if not in theory.

**18.** Similarly with respect to the conditions under which any fact is predicated. Observe in the following example the effect of putting them last:

How immense would be the stimulus to progress, were the honour now given to wealth and title given exclusively to high achievements and intrinsic worth!

And then observe the superior effect of putting them first:

Were the honour now given to wealth and title given exclusively to high achievements and intrinsic worth, how immense would be the stimulus to progress!

**19.** The effect of giving priority to the complement of the predicate, as well as the predicate itself, is finely displayed in the opening of “Hyperion”:

*“Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon and eve’s one star,  
Sat gray-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone.”*

Here it will be observed, not only that the predicate “sat” precedes the subject “Saturn,” and that the three lines in italics, constituting the complement of the predicate, come before it; but that in the structure of that complement also, the same order is followed: each line being so arranged that the qualifying words are placed before the words suggesting concrete images.

**20.** The right succession of the principal and subordinate propositions in a sentence manifestly depends on the same law. Regard for economy of the recipient's attention, which, as we find, determines the best order for the subject, copula, predicate, and their complements, dictates that the subordinate proposition shall precede the principal one, when the sentence includes two. Containing, as the subordinate proposition does, some qualifying or explanatory idea, its priority prevents misconception of the principal one; and therefore saves the mental effort needed to correct such misconception. This will be seen in the annexed example.

The secrecy once maintained in respect to the parliamentary debates, is still thought needful in diplomacy ; and in virtue of this secret diplomacy, England may any day be unawares betrayed by its ministers into a war costing a hundred thousand lives, and hundreds of millions of treasure : yet the English pique themselves on being a self-governed people.

The two subordinate propositions, ending with the semi-colon and colon respectively, almost wholly determine the meaning of the principal proposition with which it concludes ; and the effect would be lost were they placed last instead of first.

**21.** The general principle of right arrangement in sentences, which we have traced in its application to the leading divisions of them, equally determines the proper order

of their minor divisions. In every sentence of any complexity the complement to the subject contains several clauses, and that to the predicate several others; and these may be arranged in greater or less conformity to the law of easy apprehension. Of course with these, as with the larger members, the succession should be from the less specific to the more specific — from the abstract to the concrete.

**22.** Now, however, we must notice a further condition to be fulfilled in the proper construction of a sentence; but still a condition dictated by the same general principle with the other: the condition, namely, that the words and expressions most nearly related in thought shall be brought the closest together. Evidently the single words, the minor clauses, and the leading divisions of every proposition, severally qualify each other. The longer the time that elapses between the mention of any qualifying member and the member qualified, the longer must the mind be exerted in carrying forward the qualifying member ready for use. And the more numerous the qualifications to be simultaneously remembered and rightly applied, the greater will be the mental power expended, and the smaller the effect produced. Hence, other things equal, force will be gained by so arranging the members of a sentence that these suspensions shall at any moment be the fewest in number; and shall also be of the shortest duration. The following is an instance of defective combination:

A modern newspaper-statement, though probably true, would be laughed at, if quoted in a book as testimony; but the letter of a court gossip is thought good historical evidence, if written some centuries ago.

A rearrangement of this, in accordance with the principle indicated above, will be found to increase the effect. Thus:

Though probably true, a modern newspaper-statement quoted in a book as testimony, would be laughed at; but the letter of a court gossip, if written some centuries ago, is thought good historical evidence.

**23.** By making this change, some of the suspensions are avoided and others shortened; while there is less liability to produce premature conceptions. The passage quoted below from "Paradise Lost" affords a fine instance of a sentence well arranged; alike in the priority of the subordinate members, in the avoidance of long and numerous suspensions, and in the correspondence between the order of the clauses and the sequence of the phenomena described, which, by the way, is a further prerequisite to easy comprehension, and therefore to effect.

"As when a prowling wolf,  
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,  
Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve  
In hurdled cotes amid the field secure,  
Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold :  
Or as a thief bent to unhoard the cash  
Of some rich burgher, whose substantial doors,  
Cross-barr'd, and bolted fast, fear no assault,  
In at the window climbs, or o'er the tiles :  
So climb the first grand thief into God's fold ;  
So since into his church lewd hirelings climb."

**24.** The habitual use of sentences in which all or most of the descriptive and limiting elements precede those described and limited, gives rise to what is called the inverted style: a title which is, however, by no means confined to this structure, but is often used where the order of the words is simply unusual. A more appropriate title would be the *direct style*, as contrasted with the other, or *indirect style*: the peculiarity of the one being, that it conveys each thought into the mind step by step with little liability

to error; and of the other, that it gets the right thought conceived by a series of approximations.

**25.** The superiority of the direct over the indirect form of sentence, implied by the several conclusions that have been drawn, must not, however, be affirmed without reservation. Though, up to a certain point, it is well for the qualifying clauses of a period to precede those qualified; yet, as carrying forward each qualifying clause costs some mental effort, it follows that when the number of them and the time they are carried become great, we reach a limit beyond which more is lost than is gained. Other things equal, the arrangement should be such that no concrete image shall be suggested until the materials out of which it is to be made have been presented. And yet, as lately pointed out, other things equal, the fewer the materials to be held at once, and the shorter the distance they have to be borne, the better. Hence in some cases it becomes a question whether most mental effort will be entailed by the many and long suspensions, or by the correction of successive misconceptions.

**26.** This question may sometimes be decided by considering the capacity of the persons addressed. A greater grasp of mind is required for the ready comprehension of thoughts expressed in the direct manner, where the sentences are anywise intricate. To recollect a number of preliminaries stated in elucidation of a coming idea, and to apply them all to the formation of it when suggested, demands a good memory and considerable power of concentration. To one possessing these, the direct method will mostly seem the best; while to one deficient in them it will seem the worst. Just as it may cost a strong man less effort to carry a hundred-weight from place to place at once, than by a stone at a time; so, to an active mind

it may be easier to bear along all the qualifications of an idea and at once rightly form it when named, than to first imperfectly conceive such idea, and then carry back to it, one by one, the details and limitations afterwards mentioned. While conversely, as for a boy the only possible mode of transferring a hundred-weight, is that of taking it in portions; so, for a weak mind, the only possible mode of forming a compound conception may be that of building it up by carrying separately its several parts.

**27.** That the indirect method — the method of conveying the meaning by a series of approximations — is best fitted for the uncultivated, may indeed be inferred from their habitual use of it. The form of expression adopted by the savage, as in — “Water, give me,” is the simplest type of the approximate arrangement. In pleonasm, which are comparatively prevalent among the uneducated, the same essential structure is seen ; as, for instance, in — “The men, they were there.” Again, the old possessive case — “The king, his crown,” conforms to the like order of thought. Moreover, the fact that the indirect mode is called the natural one, implies that it is the one spontaneously employed by the common people : that is — the one easiest for undisciplined minds.

**28.** There are many cases, however, in which neither the direct nor the indirect structure is the best ; but where an intermediate structure is preferable to both. When the number of circumstances and qualifications to be included in the sentence is great, the most judicious course is neither to enumerate them all before introducing the idea to which they belong, nor to put this idea first and let it be remodelled to agree with the particulars afterwards mentioned ; but to do a little of each. Take a case. It is

desirable to avoid so extremely indirect an arrangement as the following :

We came to our journey's end, at last, with no small difficulty, after much fatigue, through deep roads and bad weather.

Yet to transform this into an entirely direct sentence would not produce a satisfactory effect ; as witness :

At last, with no small difficulty, after much fatigue, through deep roads and bad weather, we came to our journey's end.

Dr. Whately, from whom we quote the first of these two arrangements, proposes this construction :

At last, after much fatigue, through deep roads and bad weather, we came, with no small difficulty, to our journey's end.

**29.** Here it will be observed that by introducing the words "we came" a little earlier in the sentence, the labour of carrying forward so many particulars is diminished, and the subsequent qualification "with no small difficulty" entails an addition to the thought that is very easily made. But a further improvement may be produced by introducing the words "we came" still earlier ; especially if at the same time the qualifications be rearranged in conformity with the principle already explained, that the more abstract elements of the thought should come before the more concrete. Observe the better effect obtained by making these two changes :

At last, with no small difficulty, and after much fatigue, we came, through deep roads and bad weather, to our journey's end.

This reads with comparative smoothness ; that is — with less hindrance from suspensions and reconstructions of thought — with less mental effort.

30. Before dismissing this branch of our subject, it should be further remarked, that even when addressing the most vigorous intellects, the direct style is unfit for communicating ideas of a complex or abstract character. So long as the mind has not much to do, it may be well able to grasp all the preparatory clauses of a sentence, and to use them effectively; but if some subtlety in the argument absorb the attention—if every faculty be strained in endeavouring to catch the speaker's or writer's drift, it may happen that the mind, unable to carry on both processes at once, will break down, and allow the elements of the thought to lapse into confusion.

## II.—THE EFFECT OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE EXPLAINED

31. Turning now to consider figures of speech, we may equally discern the same general law of effect. Underlying all the rules given for the choice and right use of them, we shall find the same fundamental requirement—economy of attention. It is indeed chiefly because they so well subserve this requirement, that figures of speech are employed. To bring the mind more easily to the desired conception, is in many cases solely, and in all cases mainly, their object.

32. Let us begin with the figure called Synechdoche. The advantage sometimes gained by putting a part for the whole, is due to the more convenient, or more accurate, presentation of the idea. If, instead of saying “a fleet of ten ships,” we say “a fleet of ten *sail*,” the picture of a group of vessels at sea is more readily suggested; and is so because the sails constitute the most conspicuous parts of vessels so circumstanced: whereas the word *ships* would very likely remind us of vessels in dock. Again, to say,

"All *hands* to the pumps," is better than to say, "All *men* to the pumps;" as it suggests the men in the special attitude intended, and so saves effort. Bringing "*gray hairs* with sorrow to the grave," is another expression, the effect of which has the same cause.

33. The occasional increase of force produced by Metonymy may be similarly accounted for. "The low morality of *the bar*," is a phrase both more brief and significant than the literal one it stands for. A belief in the ultimate supremacy of intelligence over brute force, is conveyed in a more concrete, and therefore more realizable form, if we substitute *the pen* and *the sword* for the two abstract terms. To say, "Beware of drinking!" is less effective than to say, "Beware of *the bottle!*" and is so, clearly because it calls up a less specific image.

34. The Simile is in many cases used chiefly with a view to ornament; but whenever it increases the *force* of a passage, it does so by being an economy. Here is an instance :

The illusion that great men and great events came oftener in early times than now, is partly due to historical perspective. As in a range of equidistant columns, the furthest off look the closest; so, the conspicuous objects of the past seem more thickly clustered the more remote they are.

To construct by a process of literal explanation; the thought thus conveyed, would take many sentences; and the first elements of the picture would become faint while the imagination was busy in adding the others. But by the help of a comparison all effort is saved; the picture is instantly realized, and its full effect produced.

35. Of the position of the Simile,<sup>1</sup> it needs only to re-

<sup>1</sup> Properly the term "simile" is applicable only to the entire figure, inclusive of the two things compared and the comparison drawn between

mark, that what has been said respecting the order of the adjective and substantive, predicate and subject, principal and subordinate propositions, etc., is applicable here. As whatever qualifies should precede whatever is qualified, force will generally be gained by placing the simile before the object to which it is applied. That this arrangement is the best, may be seen in the following passage from the "Lady of the Lake":

"As wreath of snow, on mountain breast,  
Slides from the rock that gave it rest,  
Poor Ellen glided from her stay,  
And at the monarch's feet she lay."

Inverting these couplets will be found to diminish the effect considerably. There are cases, however, even where the simile is a simple one, in which it may with advantage be placed last; as in these lines from Alexander Smith's "Life Drama":

"I see the future stretch  
All dark and barren as a rainy sea."

The reason for this seems to be, that so abstract an idea as that attaching to the word "future," does not present itself to the mind in any definite form; and hence the subsequent arrival at the simile entails no reconstruction of the thought.

**36.** Such, however, are not the only cases in which this order is the most forcible. As the advantage of putting the simile before the object depends on its being carried forward in the mind to assist in forming an image of the object; it must happen that if, from length or complexity,

them. But as there exists no name for the illustrative member of the figure, there seems no alternative but to employ "simile" to express this also. This context will in each case show in which sense the word is used.—S.

it cannot be so carried forward, the advantage is not gained. The annexed sonnet, by Coleridge, is defective from this cause :

“ As when a child, on some long winter’s night,  
Affrighted, clinging to its grandam’s knees,  
With eager wond’ring and perturb’d delight  
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees,  
Mutter’d to wretch by necromantic spell ;  
Or of those hags who at the witching time  
Of murky midnight, ride the air sublime,  
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of hell ;  
Cold horror drinks its blood ! Anon the tear  
More gentle starts, to hear the beldame tell  
Of pretty babes, that lov’d each other dear,  
Murder’d by cruel uncle’s mandate fell :  
Ev’n such the shiv’ring joys thy tones impart,  
Ev’n so, thou, Siddons, meltest my sad heart.”

Here, from the lapse of time and accumulation of circumstances, the first part of the comparison is forgotten before its application is reached ; and requires re-reading. Had the main idea been first mentioned, less effort would have been required to retain it, and to modify the conception of it into harmony with the comparison, than to remember the comparison, and refer back to its successive features for help in forming the final image.

37. The superiority of the Metaphor to the Simile is ascribed by Dr. Whately to the fact that “ all men are more gratified at catching the resemblance for themselves, than in having it pointed out to them.” But after what has been said, the great economy it achieves will seem the more probable cause. Lear’s exclamation —

“ Ingratitude ! thou marble-hearted fiend,”

would lose part of its effect were it changed into —

Ingratitude ! thou fiend with heart like marble ;

and the loss would result partly from the position of the simile and partly from the extra number of words required. When the comparison is an involved one, the greater force of the metaphor, consequent on its greater brevity, becomes much more conspicuous. If, drawing an analogy between mental and physical phenomena, we say,

As, in passing through the crystal, beams of white light are decomposed into the colours of the rainbow ; so, in traversing the soul of the poet, the colourless rays of truth are transformed into brightly-tinted poetry ; —

it is clear that in receiving the double set of words expressing the two halves of the comparison, and in carrying the one half to the other, considerable attention is absorbed. Most of this is saved, however, by putting the comparison in a metaphorical form, thus :

The white light of truth, in traversing the many-sided transparent soul of the poet, is refracted into iris-hued poetry.

**38.** How much is conveyed in a few words by the help of the Metaphor, and how vivid the effect consequently produced, may be abundantly exemplified. From “A Life Drama” may be quoted the phrase,

“I spear’d him with a jest,”

as a fine instance among the many which that poem contains. A passage in the “Prometheus Unbound,” of Shelley, displays the power of the metaphor to great advantage :

“Methought among the lawns together  
We wandered, underneath the young gray dawn,  
And multitudes of dense white fleecy clouds  
Were wandering in thick flocks along the mountains  
*Shepherded* by the slow unwilling wind.”

This last expression is remarkable for the distinctness with which it realizes the features of the scene: bringing the mind, as it were, by a bound to the desired conception.

39. But a limit is put to the advantageous use of the Metaphor, by the condition that it must be sufficiently simple to be understood from a hint. Evidently, if there be any obscurity in the meaning or application of it, no economy of attention will be gained; but rather the reverse. Hence, when the comparison is complex, it is usual to have recourse to the Simile. There is, however, a species of figure, sometimes classed under Allegory, but which might, perhaps, be better called Compound Metaphor, that enables us to retain the brevity of the metaphorical form even where the analogy is intricate. This is done by indicating the application of the figure at the outset, and then leaving the mind to continue the parallel. Emerson has employed it with great effect in the first of his "Lectures on the Times":

The main interest which any aspects of the Times can have for us, is the great spirit which gazes through them, the light which they can shed on the wonderful questions, What are we, and Whither do we tend? We do not wish to be deceived. Here we drift, like white sail across the wild ocean, now bright on the wave, now darkling in the trough of the sea; but from what port did we sail? Who knows? Or to what port are we bound? Who knows? There is no one to tell us but such poor weather-tossed mariners as ourselves, whom we speak as we pass, or who have hoisted some signal, or floated to us some letter in a bottle from afar. But what know they more than we? They also found themselves on this wondrous sea. No; from the older sailors nothing. Over all their speaking-trumpets the gray sea and the loud winds answer — Not in us; not in Time.

40. The division of the Simile from the Metaphor is by no means a definite one. Between the one extreme in which the two elements of the comparison are detailed at full

length and the analogy pointed out, and the other extreme in which the comparison is implied instead of stated, come intermediate forms, in which the comparison is partly stated and partly implied. For instance:

Astonished at the performances of the English plough, the Hindoos paint it, set it up, and worship it; thus turning a tool into an idol: linguists do the same with language.

There is an evident advantage in leaving the reader or hearer to complete the figure. And generally these intermediate forms are good in proportion as they do this; provided the mode of completing it be obvious.

**41.** Passing over much that may be said of like purport upon Hyperbole, Personification, Apostrophe, etc., let us close our remarks upon construction by a typical example. The general principle which has been enunciated is, that other things equal, the force of all verbal forms and arrangements is great, in proportion as the time and mental effort they demand from the recipient is small. The corollaries from this general principle have been severally illustrated; and it has been shown that the relative goodness of any two modes of expressing an idea, may be determined by observing which requires the shortest process of thought for its comprehension. But though conformity in particular points has been exemplified, no cases of complete conformity have yet been quoted. It is indeed difficult to find them; for the English idiom does not commonly permit the order which theory dictates. A few however, occur in Ossian. Here is one:

As autumn's dark storms pour from two echoing hills, so towards each other approached the heroes. As two dark streams from high rocks meet and mix, and roar on the plain: loud, rough, and dark in battle meet Lochlin and Inisfail. . . . As the troubled noise of the ocean

when roll the waves on high ; as the last peal of the thunder of heaven ; such is noise of the battle.

Except in the position of the verb in the first two similes, the theoretically best arrangement is fully carried out in each of these sentences. The simile comes before the qualified image, the adjectives before the substantives, the predicate and copula before the subject, and their respective complements before them. That the passage is open to the charge of being bombastic proves nothing ; or rather, proves our case. For what is bombast but a force of expression too great for the magnitude of the ideas embodied ? All that may rightly be inferred is, that only in very rare cases, and then only to produce a climax, should *all* the conditions of effective expression be fulfilled.

### III.—ARRANGEMENT OF MINOR IMAGES IN BUILDING UP A THOUGHT

**42.** Passing on to a more complex application of the doctrine with which we set out, it must now be remarked, that not only in the structure of sentences, and the use of figures of speech, may economy of the recipient's mental energy be assigned as the cause of force ; but that in the choice and arrangement of the minor images, out of which some large thought is to be built up, we may trace the same condition to effect. To select from the sentiment, scene, or event described, those typical elements which carry many others along with them ; and so, by saying a few things but suggesting many, to abridge the description ; is the secret of producing a vivid impression. An extract from Tennyson's "Mariana" will well illustrate this :

"All day within the dreamy house,  
The door upon the hinges creaked,  
The blue fly sung i' the pane ; the mouse  
Behind the mouldering wainscot shrieked,  
Or from the crevice peered about."

The several circumstances here specified bring with them many appropriate associations. Our attention is rarely drawn by the buzzing of a fly in the window, save when every thing is still. While the inmates are moving about the house, mice usually keep silence ; and it is only when extreme quietness reigns that they peep from their retreats. Hence each of the facts mentioned, presupposing numerous others, calls up these with more or less distinctness ; and revives the feeling of dull solitude with which they are connected in our experience. Were all these facts detailed instead of suggested, the attention would be so frittered away that little impression of dreariness would be produced. Similarly in other cases. Whatever the nature of the thought to be conveyed, this skilful selection of a few particulars which imply the rest, is the key to success. In the choice of competent ideas, as in the choice of expressions, the aim must be to convey the greatest quantity of thoughts with the smallest quantity of words.

**43.** The same principle may in some cases be advantageously carried yet further, by indirectly suggesting some entirely distinct thought in addition to the one expressed. Thus if we say,

The head of a good classic is as full of ancient myths, as that of a servant-girl of ghost stories ;

it is manifest that besides the fact asserted, there is an implied opinion respecting the small value of classical knowledge : and as this implied opinion is recognized

much sooner than it can be put into words, there is gain in omitting it. In other cases, again, great effect is produced by an overt omission; provided the nature of the idea left out is obvious. A good instance of this occurs in "Heroes and Hero-worship." After describing the way in which Burns was sacrificed to the idle curiosity of Lion-hunters — people who came not out of sympathy but merely to *see* him — people who sought a little amusement, and who got their amusement while "the Hero's life went for it!" Carlyle suggests a parallel thus:

Richter says, in the Island of Sumatra there is a kind of "Light-chafers" large Fire-flies, which people stick upon spits, and illuminate the ways with at night. Persons of condition can thus travel with a pleasant radiance, which they much admire. Great honour to the Fire-flies. But — ! —

#### IV.—THE SUPERIORITY OF POETRY TO PROSE EXPLAINED

**44.** Before inquiring whether the law of effect, thus far traced, explains the superiority of poetry to prose, it will be needful to notice some supplementary causes of force in expression, that have not yet been mentioned. These are not, properly speaking, additional causes; but rather secondary ones, originating from those already specified — reflex results of them. In the first place, then, we may remark that mental excitement spontaneously prompts the use of those forms of speech which have been pointed out as the most effective. "Out with him!" "Away with him!" are the natural utterances of angry citizens at a disturbed meeting. A voyager, describing a terrible storm he had witnessed, would rise to some such climax as — "Crack went the ropes and down came the mast." Astonishment may be heard expressed in the phrase — "Never

was there such a sight!" All of which sentences are, it will be observed, constructed after the direct type. Again, every one knows that excited persons are given to figures of speech. The vituperation of the vulgar abounds with them: often, indeed, consists of little else. "Beast," "brute," "gallows rogue," "cut-throat villain," these, and other like metaphors and metaphorical epithets, at once call to mind a street quarrel. Further, it may be noticed that extreme brevity is another characteristic of passionate language. The sentences are generally incomplete; the particles are omitted; and frequently important words are left to be gathered from the context. Great admiration does not vent itself in a precise proposition, as—"It is beautiful;" but in the simple exclamation,—"Beautiful!" He who, when reading a lawyer's letter, should say, "Vile rascal!" would be thought angry; while, "He is a vile rascal," would imply comparative coolness. Thus we see that alike in the order of the words, in the frequent use of figures, and in extreme conciseness, the natural utterances of excitement conform to the theoretical conditions of forcible expression.

**45.** Hence, then, the higher forms of speech acquire a secondary strength from association. Having, in actual life, habitually heard them in connection with vivid mental impressions; and having been accustomed to meet with them in the most powerful writing; they come to have in themselves a species of force. The emotions that have from time to time been produced by the strong thoughts wrapped up in these forms, are partially aroused by the forms themselves. They create a certain degree of animation; they induce a preparatory sympathy; and when the striking ideas looked for are reached, they are the more vividly realized.

**46.** The continuous use of these modes of expression that are alike forcible in themselves and forcible from their associations, produces the peculiarly impressive species of composition which we call poetry. Poetry, we shall find, habitually adopts those symbols of thought, and those methods of using them, which instinct and analysis agree in choosing as most effective ; and becomes poetry by virtue of doing this. On turning back to the various specimens that have been quoted, it will be seen that the direct or inverted form of sentence predominates in them ; and that to a degree quite inadmissible in prose. And not only in the frequency, but in what is termed the violence of the inversions, will this distinction be remarked. In the abundant use of figures, again, we may recognize the same truth. Metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and personifications, are the poet's colours, which he has liberty to employ almost without limit. We characterize as "poetical" the prose which uses these appliances of language with any frequency ; and condemn it as "over florid" or "affected" long before they occur with the profusion allowed in verse. Further, let it be remarked that in brevity — the other requisite of forcible expression which theory points out, and emotion spontaneously fulfils — poetical phraseology similarly differs from ordinary phraseology. Imperfect periods are frequent ; elisions are perpetual ; and many of the minor words, which would be deemed essential in prose, are dispensed with.

**47.** Thus poetry, regarded as a vehicle of thought, is especially impressive partly because it obeys all the laws of effective speech, and partly because in so doing it imitates the natural utterances of excitement. While the matter embodied is idealized emotion, the vehicle is the idealized language of emotion. As the musical composer

catches the cadences in which our feelings of joy and sympathy, grief and despair, vent themselves, and out of these germs evolves melodies suggesting higher phases of these feelings ; so, the poet develops from the typical expressions in which men utter passion and sentiment, those choice forms of verbal combination in which concentrated passion and sentiment may be fitly presented.

**48.** There is one peculiarity of poetry conduced much to its effect—the peculiarity which is indeed usually thought its characteristic one—still remaining to be considered : we mean its rhythmical structure. This, improbable though it seems, will be found to come under the same generalization with the others. Like each of them, it is an idealization of the natural language of strong emotion, which is known to be more or less metrical if the emotion be not too violent ; and like each of them it is an economy of the reader's or hearer's attention. In the peculiar tone and manner we adopt in uttering versified language, may be discerned its relationship to the feelings ; and the pleasure which its measured movement gives us, is ascribable to the comparative ease with which words metrically arranged can be recognized.

**49.** This last position will scarcely be at once admitted ; but a little explanation will show its reasonableness. For if, as we have seen, there is an expenditure of mental energy in the mere act of listening to verbal articulations, or in that silent repetition of them which goes on in reading—if the perceptive faculties must be in active exercise to identify every syllable —then, any mode of so combining words as to present a regular recurrence of certain traits which the mind can anticipate, will diminish that strain upon the attention required by the total irregularity of prose. Just as the body, in receiving a series of vary-

ing concussions, must keep the muscles ready to meet the most violent of them, as not knowing when such may come; so, the mind in receiving unarranged articulations, must keep its perceptives active enough to recognize the least easily caught sounds. And as, if the concussions recur in a definite order, the body may husband its forces by adjusting the resistance needful for each concussion; so, if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable.

50. Far-fetched though this idea will perhaps be thought, a little introspection will countenance it. That we *do* take advantage of metrical language to adjust our perceptive faculties to the force of the expected articulations, is clear from the fact that we are balked by halting versification. Much as at the bottom of a flight of stairs, a step more or less than we counted upon gives us a shock; so, too, does a misplaced accent or a supernumerary syllable. In the one case, we *know* that there is an erroneous preadjustment; and we can scarcely doubt that there is one in the other. But if we habitually preadjust our perceptions to the measured movement of verse, the physical analogy above given renders it probable that by so doing we economize attention; and hence that metrical language is more effective than prose, because it enables us to do this.

51. Were there space, it might be worth while to inquire whether the pleasure we take in rhyme, and also that which we take in euphony, are not partly ascribable to the same general cause.

## PART II

### CAUSES OF FORCE IN LANGUAGE WHICH DEPEND UPON ECONOMY OF THE MENTAL SENSIBILITIES

**52.** A few paragraphs only, can be devoted to a second division of our subject that here presents itself. To pursue in detail the laws of effect, as applying to the larger features of composition, would carry us beyond our limits. But we may briefly indicate a further aspect of the general principle hitherto traced out, and hint a few of its wider applications.

**53.** Thus far, then, we have considered only those causes of force in language which depend upon economy of the mental *energies*: we have now to glance at those which depend upon economy of the mental *sensibilities*. Questionable though this division may be as a psychological one, it will yet serve roughly to indicate the remaining field of investigation. It will suggest that besides considering the extent to which any faculty or group of faculties is tasked in receiving a form of words and realizing its contained idea, we have to consider the state in which this faculty or group of faculties is left; and how the reception of subsequent sentences and images will be influenced by that state. Without going at length into so wide a topic as the exercise of faculties and its reactive effects, it will be sufficient here to call to mind that every faculty (when in a state of normal activity) is most capable at the outset; and that the change in its condition, which ends in what we term exhaustion, begins simulta-

neously with its exercise. This generalization, with which we are all familiar in our bodily experiences, and which our daily language recognizes as true of the mind as a whole, is equally true of each mental power, from the simplest of the senses to the most complex of the sentiments. If we hold a flower to the nose for long, we become insensible to its scent. We say of a very brilliant flash of lightning that it blinds us; which means that our eyes have for a time lost their ability to appreciate light. After eating a quantity of honey, we are apt to think our tea is without sugar. The phrase "a deafening roar," implies that men find a very loud sound temporarily incapacitates them for hearing faint ones. To a hand which has for some time carried a heavy body, small bodies afterwards lifted seem to have lost their weight. Now, the truth at once recognized in these, its extreme manifestations, may be traced throughout. It may be shown that alike in the reflective faculties, in the imagination, in the perceptions of the beautiful, the ludicrous, the sublime, in the sentiments, the instincts, in all the mental powers, however we may classify them—action exhausts; and that in proportion as the action is violent, the subsequent prostration is great.

**54.** Equally, throughout the whole nature, may be traced the law that exercised faculties are ever tending to resume their original state. Not only after continued rest, do they regain their full power—not only do brief cessations partially reinvigorate them; but even while they are in action, the resulting exhaustion is ever being neutralized. The two processes of waste and repair go on together. Hence with faculties habitually exercised—as the senses of all persons, or the muscles of any one who is strong—it happens that, during moderate activity, the repair is so

nearly equal to the waste, that the diminution of power is scarcely appreciable; and it is only when the activity has been long continued, or has been very violent, that the repair becomes so far in arrear of the waste as to produce a perceptible prostration. In all cases, however, when, by the action of a faculty, waste has been incurred, *some* lapse of time must take place before full efficiency can be reacquired; and this time must be long in proportion as the waste has been great.

55. Keeping in mind these general truths, we shall be in a condition to understand certain causes of effect in composition now to be considered. Every perception received, and every conception realized, entailing some amount of waste — or, as Liebig would say, some change of matter in the brain; and the efficiency of the faculties subject to this waste being thereby temporarily, though often but momentarily, diminished; the resulting partial inability must affect the acts of perception and conception that immediately succeed. And hence we may expect that the vividness with which images are realized will, in many cases, depend on the order of their presentation: even when one order is as convenient to the understanding as the other.

56. There are sundry facts which alike illustrate this, and are explained by it. Climax is one of them. The marked effect obtained by placing last the most striking of any series of images, and the weakness — often the ludicrous weakness — produced by reversing this arrangement, depends on the general law indicated. As immediately after looking at the sun we cannot perceive the light of a fire, while by looking at the fire first and the sun afterwards we can perceive both; so, after receiving a brilliant, or weighty, or terrible thought, we cannot appreciate a less

brilliant, less weighty, or less terrible one, while, by reversing the order, we can appreciate each. In Antithesis, again, we may recognize the same general truth. The opposition of two thoughts that are the reverse of each other in some prominent trait, insures an impressive effect; and does this by giving a momentary relaxation to the faculties addressed. If, after a series of images of an ordinary character, appealing in a moderate degree to the sentiment of reverence, or approbation, or beauty, the mind has presented to it a very insignificant, a very unworthy, or a very ugly image; the faculty of reverence, or approbation, or beauty, as the case may be, having for the time nothing to do, tends to resume its full power; and will immediately afterwards appreciate a vast, admirable, or beautiful image better than it would otherwise do. Conversely, where the idea of absurdity due to extreme insignificance is to be produced, it may be greatly intensified by placing it after something highly impressive: especially if the form of phrase implies that something still more impressive is coming. A good illustration of the effect gained by thus presenting a petty idea to a consciousness that has not yet recovered from the shock of an exciting one, occurs in a sketch by Balzac. His hero writes to a mistress who has cooled towards him, the following letter :

Madame,— Votre conduite m'étonne autant qu'elle m'afflige. Non contente de me déchirer le cœur par vos dédains, vous avez l'indélicatesse de me retenir une brosse à dents, que mes moyens ne me permettent pas de remplacer, mes propriétés étant grecées d'hypothèques.

Adieu, trop belle et trop ingrate amie! Puissions nous nous revoir dans un monde meilleur!

CHARLES-EDOUARD.

**57.** Thus we see that the phenomena of Climax, Antithesis, and Anticlimax, alike result from this general principle. Improbable as these momentary variations in susceptibility may seem, we cannot doubt their occurrence when we contemplate the analogous variations in the susceptibility of the senses. Referring once more to phenomena of vision, every one knows that a patch of black on a white ground looks blacker, and a patch of white on a black ground looks whiter, than elsewhere. As the blackness and the whiteness must really be the same, the only assignable cause for this, is a difference in their actions upon us, dependent upon the different states of our faculties. It is simply a visual antithesis.

**58.** But this extension of the general principle of economy — this further condition to effective composition, that the sensitiveness of the faculties must be continuously husbanded — includes much more than has been yet hinted. It implies not only that certain arrangements and certain juxtapositions of connected ideas are best; but that some modes of dividing and presenting a subject will be more striking than others; and that, too, irrespective of its logical cohesion. It shows why we must progress from the less interesting to the more interesting; and why not only the composition as a whole, but each of its successive portions, should tend towards a climax. At the same time, it forbids long continuity of the same kind of thought, or repeated production of like effects. It warns us against the error committed both by Pope in his poems and by Bacon in his essays — the error, namely, of constantly employing forcible forms of expression: and it points out that as the easiest posture by and by becomes fatiguing, and is with pleasure exchanged for one less easy; so, the most perfectly-constructed sentences will soon

wearied, and relief will be given by using those of an inferior kind.

59. Further, we may infer from it not only that should we avoid generally combining our words in one manner, however good, or working out our figures and illustrations in one way, however telling; but that we should avoid any thing like uniform adherence, even to the wider conditions of effect. We should not make every section of our subject progress in interest; we should not always rise to a climax. As we saw that, in single sentences, it is but rarely allowable to fulfil all the conditions to strength; so, in the larger sections of a composition we must not often conform entirely to the law indicated. We must subordinate the component effect to the total effect.

60. In deciding how practically to carry out the principles of artistic composition, we may derive help by bearing in mind a fact already pointed out — the fitness of certain verbal arrangements for certain kinds of thought. That constant variety in the mode of presenting ideas which the theory demands, will in a great degree result from a skilful adaptation of the form to the matter. We saw how the direct or inverted sentence is spontaneously used by excited people; and how their language is also characterized by figures of speech and by extreme brevity. Hence these may with advantage predominate in emotional passages; and may increase as the emotion rises. On the other hand, for complex ideas, the indirect sentence seems the best vehicle. In conversation, the excitement produced by the near approach to a desired conclusion, will often show itself in a series of short, sharp sentences; while, in impressing a view already enunciated, we generally make our periods voluminous by piling thought

upon thought. These natural modes of procedure may serve as guides in writing. Keen observation and skilful analysis would, in like manner, detect further peculiarities of expression produced by other attitudes of mind, and by paying due attention to all such traits, a writer possessed of sufficient versatility might make some approach to a completely-organized work.

61. This species of composition which the law of effect points out as the perfect one, is the one which high genius tends naturally to produce. As we found that the kinds of sentence which are theoretically best, are those generally employed by superior minds, and by inferior minds when excitement has raised them; so, we shall find that the ideal form for a poem, essay, or fiction, is that which the ideal writer would evolve spontaneously. One in whom the powers of expression fully responded to the state of feeling, would unconsciously use that variety in the mode of presenting his thoughts, which Art demands. This constant employment of one species of phraseology, which all have now to strive against, implies an undeveloped faculty of language. To have a specific style is to be poor in speech. If we remember that in the far past, men had only nouns and verbs to convey their ideas with, and that from then to now the growth has been towards a greater number of implements of thought, and consequently towards a greater complexity and variety in their combinations; we may infer that we are now, in our use of sentences, much what the primitive man was in his use of words; and that a continuance of the process that has hitherto gone on, must produce increasing heterogeneity in our modes of expression. As now, in a fine nature, the play of the features, the tones of the voice and its cadences, vary in harmony with every thought uttered; so, in one

possessed of a fully-developed power of speech, the mould in which each combination of words is cast will similarly vary with, and be appropriate to the sentiment.

**62.** That a perfectly-endowed man must unconsciously write in all styles, we may infer from considering how styles originate. Why is Johnson pompous, Goldsmith simple? Why is one author abrupt, another rhythmical, another concise? Evidently in each case the habitual mode of utterance must depend upon the habitual balance of the nature. The predominant feelings have by use trained the intellect to represent them. But while long, though unconscious, discipline has made it do this efficiently, it remains, from lack of practice, incapable of doing the same for the less active feelings; and when these are excited, the usual verbal forms undergo but slight modifications. Let the powers of speech be fully developed, however—let the ability of the intellect to utter the emotions be complete; and this fixity of style will disappear. The perfect writer will express himself as Junius, when in the Junius frame of mind; when he feels as Lamb felt, will use a like familiar speech; and will fall into the ruggedness of Carlyle when in a Carlylean mood. Now he will be rhythmical and now irregular; here his language will be plain and there ornate; sometimes his sentences will be balanced and at other times unsymmetrical; for a while there will be considerable sameness, and then again great variety. His mode of expression naturally responding to his state of feeling, there will flow from his pen a composition changing to the same degree that the aspects of his subject change. He will thus without effort conform to what we have seen to be the laws of effect. And while his work presents to the reader that variety needful to prevent continuous

exertion of the same faculties, it will also answer to the description of all highly-organized products, both of man and of nature: it will be, not a series of like parts simply placed in juxtaposition, but one whole made up of unlike parts that are mutually dependent.

## GEORGE HENRY LEWES

### THE PRINCIPLE OF BEAUTY<sup>1</sup>

[“I propose,” says Lewes, “to treat of the Principles of Success in Literature, in the belief that if a clear recognition of the principles which underlie *all* successful writing could once be gained, it would be no inconsiderable help to many a young and thoughtful mind.” After stating causes which lead writers to failure—the lowering of standard, desire for applause, and the like—he enumerates the principles on which success depends; these he puts in the forms of so-called “laws,” and they are three in number: the “Principle of Vision,” or the ability to see things and to have original ideas; the “Principle of Sincerity,” that is, the desire of the writer to express ideas as he himself has them; and the “Principle of Beauty,” which is substantially style, and which, like the other principles, Lewes treats at some length. His exposition of this idea of style appears in the following chapter.]

1. It is not enough that a man has clearness of Vision, and reliance on Sincerity, he must also have the art of Expression, or he will remain obscure. Many have had

“The visionary eye, the faculty to see  
The thing that hath been as the thing which is,”

but either from native defect, or the mistaken bias of education, have been frustrated in the attempt to give their visions beautiful or intelligible shape. The art which could give them shape is doubtless intimately dependent on clearness of eye and sincerity of purpose, but it is also something over and above these, and comes from an organic

<sup>1</sup> Chapter V of *The Principles of Success in Literature* (published in the *Fortnightly Review*, 1865).

aptitude not less special, when possessed with fulness, than the aptitude for music or drawing. Any instructed person can write, as any one can learn to draw; but to write well, to express ideas with felicity and force, is not an accomplishment but a talent. The power of seizing unapparent relations of things is not always conjoined with the power of selecting the fittest verbal symbols by which they can be made apparent to others: the one is the power of the thinker, the other the power of the writer.

2. "Style," says De Quincey, "has two separate functions—first, to brighten the *intelligibility* of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal *power* and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities. . . . Decaying lineaments are to be retraced, and faded colouring to be refreshed." To effect these purposes we require a rich verbal memory from which to select the symbols best fitted to call up images in the reader's mind, and we also require the delicate selective instinct to guide us in the choice and arrangement of those symbols, so that the rhythm and cadence may agreeably attune the mind, rendering it receptive to the impressions meant to be communicated. A copious verbal memory, like a copious memory of facts, is only one source of power, and without the high controlling faculty of the artist may lead to diffusive indecision. Just as one man, gifted with keen insight, will from a small stock of facts extricate unapparent relations to which others, rich in knowledge, have been blind; so will a writer, gifted with a fine instinct, select from a narrow range of phrases symbols of beauty and of power utterly beyond the reach of commonplace minds. It is often considered, both by writers and readers, that fine language makes fine writers; yet no one supposes that

fine colours make a fine painter. The *copia verborum* is often a weakness and a snare. As Arthur Helps says, men use several epithets in the hope that one of them may fit. But the artist knows which epithet does fit, uses that, and rejects the rest. The characteristic weakness of bad writers is inaccuracy: their symbols do not adequately express their ideas. Pause but for a moment over their sentences, and you perceive that they are using language at random, the choice being guided rather by some indistinct association of phrases, or some broken echoes of familiar sounds, than by any selection of words to represent ideas. I read the other day of the truck system being "rampant" in a certain district; and every day we may meet with similar echoes of familiar words which betray the flaccid condition of the writer's mind drooping under the labour of expression.

3. Except in the rare cases of great dynamic thinkers whose thoughts are as turning-points in the history of our race, it is by Style that writers gain distinction, by Style they secure their immortality. In a lower sphere many are remarked as writers although they may lay no claim to distinction as thinkers, if they have the faculty of felicitously expressing the ideas of others; and many who are really remarkable as thinkers gain but slight recognition from the public, simply because in them the faculty of expression is feeble. In proportion as the work passes from the sphere of passionless intelligence to that of impassioned intelligence, from the region of demonstration to the region of emotion, the art of Style becomes more complex, its necessity more imperious. But even in Philosophy and Science the art is both subtle and necessary; the choice and arrangement of the fitting symbols, though less difficult than in Art, is quite indispensable to success.

If the distinction which I formerly drew between the Scientific and the Artistic tendencies be accepted, it will disclose a corresponding difference in the Style which suits a ratiocinative exposition fixing attention on abstract relations, and an emotive exposition fixing attention on objects as related to the feelings. We do not expect the scientific writer to stir our emotions, otherwise than by the secondary influences which arise from our awe and delight at the unveiling of new truths. In his own researches he should extricate himself from the perturbing influences of emotion, and consequently he should protect us from such suggestions in his exposition. Feeling too often smites intellect with blindness, and intellect too often paralyzes the free play of emotion, not to call for a decisive separation of the two. But this separation is no ground for the disregard of Style in works of pure demonstration — as we shall see by-and-by.

4. The Principle of Beauty is only another name for Style, which is an art, incommunicable as are all other arts, but like them subordinated to laws founded on psychological conditions. The laws constitute the Philosophy of Criticism ; and I shall have to ask the reader's indulgence if for the first time I attempt to expound them scientifically in the chapter to which the present is only an introduction. A knowledge of these laws, even presuming them to be accurately expounded, will no more give a writer the power of felicitous expression than a knowledge of the laws of colour, perspective, and proportion will enable a critic to paint a picture. But all good writing must conform to these laws ; all bad writing will be found to violate them. And the utility of the knowledge will be that of a constant monitor, warning the artist of the errors into which he has slipped, or into which he may slip if unwarned.

5. How is it that while every one acknowledges the importance of Style, and numerous critics from Quintilian and Longinus down to Quarterly Reviewers have written upon it, very little has been done towards a satisfactory establishment of principles? Is it not partly because the critics have seldom held the true purpose of Style steadily before their eyes, and still seldomer justified their canons by deducing them from psychological conditions? To my apprehension they seem to have mistaken the real sources of influence, and have fastened attention upon some accidental or collateral details, instead of tracing the direct connection between effects and causes. Misled by the splendour of some great renown they have concluded that to write like Cicero or to paint like Titian must be the pathway to success; which is true in one sense, and profoundly false as they understand it. One pestilent contagious error issued from this misconception, namely, that all maxims confirmed by the practice of the great artists must be maxims for the art; although a close examination might reveal that the practice of these artists may have been the result of their peculiar individualities or of the state of culture at their epoch. A true Philosophy of Criticism would exhibit in how far such maxims were universal, as founded on laws of human nature, and in how far adaptations to particular individualities. A great talent will discover new methods. A great success ought to put us on the track of new principles. But the fundamental laws of Style, resting on the truths of human nature, may be illustrated, they cannot be guaranteed by any individual success. Moreover, the strong individuality of the artist will create special modifications of the laws to suit himself, making that excellent or durable which in other hands would be intolerable. If the purpose of Literature

be the sincere expression of the individual's own ideas and feelings it is obvious that the cant about the "best models" tends to pervert and obstruct that expression. Unless a man thinks and feels precisely after the manner of Cicero and Titian it is manifestly wrong for him to express himself in their way. He may study in them the principles of effect, and try to surprise some of their secrets, but he should resolutely shun all imitation of them. They ought to be illustrations not authorities, studies not models.

6. The fallacy about models is seen at once if we ask this simple question: Will the practice of a great writer justify a solecism in grammar or a confusion in logic? No. Then why should it justify any other detail not to be reconciled with universal truth? If we are forced to invoke the arbitration of reason in the one case, we must do so in the other. Unless we set aside the individual practice whenever it is irreconcilable with general principles, we shall be unable to discriminate in a successful work those merits which *secured* from those demerits which *accompanied* success. Now this is precisely the condition in which Criticism has always been. It has been formal instead of being psychological: it has drawn its maxims from the works of successful artists, instead of ascertaining the psychological principles involved in the effects of those works. When the perplexed dramatist called down curses on the man who invented fifth acts, he never thought of escaping from his tribulation by writing a play in four acts; the formal canon which made five acts indispensable to a tragedy was drawn from the practice of great dramatists, but there was no demonstration of any psychological demand on the part of the audience for precisely five acts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English critics are much less pedantic in adherence to "rules" than the French, yet when, many years ago, there appeared a tragedy in three acts, and

7. Although no instructed mind will for a moment doubt the immense advantage of the stimulus and culture derived from a reverent familiarity with the works of our great predecessors and contemporaries, there is a pernicious error which has been fostered by many instructed minds, rising out of their reverence for greatness and their forgetfulness of the ends of Literature. This error is the notion of "models," and of fixed canons drawn from the practice of great artists. It substitutes Imitation for Invention ; reproduction of old types instead of the creation of new. There is more bad than good work produced in consequence of the assiduous following of models. And we shall seldom be very wide of the mark if in our estimation of youthful productions we place more reliance on their departures from what has been already done, than on their resemblances to the best artists. An energetic crudity, even a riotous absurdity, has more promise in it than a clever and elegant mediocrity, because it shows that the young man is speaking out of his own heart, and struggling to express himself in his own way rather than in the way he finds in other men's books. The early works of original writers are usually very bad ; then succeeds a short interval of imitation in which the influence of some favourite author is distinctly traceable ; but this does not last long, the native independence of the mind reasserts itself, and although perhaps academic and critical demands are somewhat disregarded, so that the original writer on account of his very originality receives but slight recognition from the authorities, nevertheless if there is any real power in the voice it

without a death, these innovations were considered inadmissible ; and if the success of the work had been such as to elicit critical discussion, the necessity of five acts and a death would doubtless have been generally insisted on.

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soon makes itself felt in the world. There is one word of counsel I would give to young authors, which is that they should be humbly obedient to the truth proclaimed by their own souls, and haughtily indifferent to the remonstrances of critics founded solely on any departure from the truths expressed by others. It by no means follows that because a work is unlike works that have gone before it, therefore it is excellent or even tolerable; it may be original in error or in ugliness; but one thing is certain, that in proportion to its close fidelity to the matter and manner of existing works will be its intrinsic worthlessness. And one of the severest assaults on the fortitude of an unacknowledged writer comes from the knowledge that his critics, with rare exceptions, will judge his work in reference to pre-existing models, and not in reference to the ends of Literature and the laws of human nature. He knows that he will be compared with artists whom he ought not to resemble if his work have truth and originality; and finds himself teased with disparaging remarks which are really compliments in their objections. He can comfort himself by his trust in truth and the sincerity of his own work. He may also draw strength from the reflection that the public and posterity may cordially appreciate the work in which constituted authorities see nothing but failure. The history of Literature abounds in examples of critics being entirely at fault—missing the old familiar landmarks, these guides at once set up a shout of warning that the path has been missed.

**8.** Very noticeable is the fact that of the thousands who have devoted years to the study of the classics, especially to the "niceties of phrase" and "chastity of composition," so much prized in these classics, very few have learned to write with felicity, and not many with accuracy.

Native incompetence has doubtless largely influenced this result in men who are insensible to the nicer shades of distinction in terms, and want the subtle sense of congruity ; but the false plan of studying "models" without clearly understanding the psychological conditions which the effects involve, without seeing why great writing is effective and where it is merely individual expression, has injured even vigorous minds and paralyzed the weak. From a similar mistake hundreds have deceived themselves in trying to catch the trick of phrase peculiar to some distinguished contemporary. In vain do they imitate the Latinisms and antitheses of Johnson, the epigrammatic sentences of Macaulay, the colloquial ease of Thackeray, the cumulative pomp of Milton, the diffusive play of De Quincey : a few friendly or ignorant reviewers may applaud it as "brilliant writing," but the public remains unmoved. It is imitation, and as such it is lifeless.

9. We see at once the mistake directly we understand that a genuine style is the living body of thought, not a costume that can be put on and off ; it is the expression of the writer's mind ; it is not less the incarnation of his thoughts in verbal symbols than a picture is the painter's incarnation of his thoughts in symbols of form and colour. A man may, if it please him, dress his thoughts in the tawdry splendour of a masquerade. But this is no more Literature than the masquerade is Life.

10. No Style can be good that is not sincere. It must be the expression of its author's mind. There are, of course, certain elements of composition which must be mastered as a dancer learns his steps, but the style of the writer, like the grace of the dancer, is only made effective by such mastery ; it springs from a deeper source. Initiation into the rules of construction will save us from some

gross errors of composition, but it will not make a style. Still less will imitation of another's manner make one. In our day there are many who imitate Macaulay's short sentences, iterations, antitheses, geographical and historical illustrations, and eighteenth century diction, but who accepts them as Macaulay's? They cannot seize the secret of his charm, because that charm lies in the felicity of his talent, not in the structure of his sentences; in the fulness of his knowledge, not in the character of his illustrations. Other men aim at ease and vigour by discarding Latinisms, and admitting colloquialisms; but vigour and ease are not to be had on recipe. No study of models, no attention to rules, will give the easy turn, the graceful phrase, the simple word, the fervid movement, or the large clearness; a picturesque talent will express itself in concrete images; a genial nature will smile in pleasant turns and innuendoes; a rapid, unhesitating, imperious mind will deliver its quick incisive phrases; a full deliberating mind will overflow in ample paragraphs laden with the weight of parentheses and qualifying suggestions. The style which is good in one case would be vicious in another. The broken rhythm which increases the energy of one style would ruin the *largo* of another. Both are excellencies where both are natural.

11. We are always disagreeably impressed by an obvious imitation of the manner of another, because we feel it to be an insincerity, and also because it withdraws our attention from the thing said, to the way of saying it. And, here lies the great lesson writers have to learn — namely, that they should think of the immediate purpose of their writing, which is to convey truths and emotions, in symbols and images, intelligible and suggestive. The racket-player keeps his eye on the ball he is to strike, not on the racket with which he strikes. If the writer sees vividly, and will

say honestly what he sees, and how he sees it, he may want something of the grace and felicity of other men, but he will have all the strength and felicity with which nature has endowed him. More than that he cannot attain, and he will fall very short of it in snatching at the grace which is another's. Do what he will, he cannot escape from the infirmities of his own mind : the affectation, arrogance, ostentation, hesitation, native in the man will taint his style, no matter how closely he may copy the manner of another. For evil and for good, *le style est de l'homme même.*

12. The French critics, who are singularly servile to all established reputations, and whose unreasoning idolatry of their own classics is one of the reasons why their Literature is not richer, are fond of declaring with magisterial emphasis that the rules of good taste and the canons of style were fixed once and for ever by their great writers in the seventeenth century. The true ambition of every modern is said to be by careful study of these models to approach (though with no hope of equalling) their chastity and elegance. That a writer of the nineteenth century should express himself in the manner which was admirable in the seventeenth is an absurdity which needs only to be stated. It is not worth refuting. But it never presents itself thus to the French. In their minds it is a lingering remnant of that older superstition which believed the Ancients to have discovered all wisdom, so that if we could only surprise the secret of Aristotle's thoughts and clearly comprehend the drift of Plato's theories (which unhappily was not clear) we should compass all knowledge. How long this superstition lasted cannot accurately be settled ; perhaps it is not quite extinct even yet ; but we know how little the most earnest students succeeded in surprising the secrets of the universe by reading Greek treatises, and how much by

studying the universe itself. Advancing Science daily discredits the superstition ; yet the advance of Criticism has not yet wholly discredited the parallel superstition in Art. The earliest thinkers are no longer considered the wisest, but the earliest artists are still proclaimed the finest. Even those who do not believe in this superiority are, for the most part, overawed by tradition and dare not openly question the supremacy of works which in their private convictions hold a very subordinate rank. And this reserve is encouraged by the intemperate scorn of those who question the supremacy without having the knowledge or the sympathy which could fairly appreciate the earlier artists. Attacks on the classics by men ignorant of the classical languages tend to perpetuate the superstition.

**13.** But be the merit of the classics, ancient and modern, what it may, no writer can become a classic by imitating them. The principle of Sincerity here ministers to the principle of Beauty by forbidding imitation and enforcing rivalry. Write what you can, and if you have the grace of felicitous expression or the power of energetic expression your style will be admirable and admired. At any rate see that it be your own, and not another's ; on no other terms will the world listen to it. You cannot be eloquent by borrowing from the opulence of another ; you cannot be humorous by mimicking the whims of another ; what was a pleasant smile dimpling his features becomes a grimace on yours.

**14.** It will not be supposed that I would have the great writers disregarded, as if nothing were to be learned from them ; but the study of great writers should be the study of general principles as illustrated or revealed in these writers ; and if properly pursued it will of itself lead to a condemnation of the notion of models. What we may learn

from them is a nice discrimination of the symbols which intelligibly express the shades of meaning and kindle emotion. The writer wishes to give his thoughts a literary form. This is for others, not for himself; consequently he must, before all things, desire to be intelligible, and to be so he must adapt his expressions to the mental condition of his audience. If he employs arbitrary symbols, such as old words in new and unexpected senses, he may be clear as daylight to himself, but to others, dark as fog. And the difficulty of original writing lies in this, that what is new and individual must find expression in old symbols. This difficulty can only be mastered by a peculiar talent, strengthened and rendered nimble by practice, and the commerce with original minds. Great writers should be our companions if we would learn to write greatly; but no familiarity with their manner will supply the place of native endowment. Writers are born, no less than poets, and like poets, they learn to make their native gifts effective. Practice, aiding their vigilant sensibility, teaches them, perhaps unconsciously, certain methods of effective presentation, how one arrangement of words carries with it more power than another, how familiar and concrete expressions are demanded in one place, and in another place abstract expressions unclogged with disturbing suggestions. Every author thus silently amasses a store of empirical rules, furnished by his own practice, and confirmed by the practice of others. A true Philosophy of Criticism would reduce these empirical rules to science by ranging them under psychological laws, thus demonstrating the validity of the rules, not in virtue of their having been employed by Cicero or Addison, by Burke or Sydney Smith, but in virtue of their conformity with the constancies of human nature.

15. The importance of Style is generally unsuspected by philosophers and men of science, who are quite aware of its advantage in all departments of *belles lettres*; and if you allude in their presence to the deplorably defective presentation of the ideas in some work distinguished for its learning, its profundity or its novelty, it is probable that you will be despised as a frivolous setter up of manner over matter, a light-minded *dilettante*, unfitted for the simple austerities of science. But this is itself a light-minded contempt; a deeper insight would change the tone, and help to remove the disgraceful slovenliness and feebleness of composition which deface the majority of grave works, except those written by Frenchmen, who have been taught that composition is an art, and that no writer may neglect it. In England and Germany, men who will spare no labour in research, grudge all labour in style; a morning is cheerfully devoted to verifying a quotation, by one who will not spare ten minutes to reconstruct a clumsy sentence; a reference is sought with ardour, an appropriate expression in lieu of the inexact phrase which first suggests itself does not seem worth seeking. What are we to say to a man who spends a quarter's income on a diamond pin which he sticks in a greasy cravat? a man who calls public attention on him, and appears in a slovenly undress? Am I to bestow applause on some insignificant parade of erudition, and withhold blame from the stupidities of style which surround it?

16. Had there been a clear understanding of Style as the living body of thought, and not its "dress," which might be more or less ornamental, the error I am noticing would not have spread so widely. But, naturally, when men regarded the grace of style as mere grace of manner, and not as the delicate precision giving form and relief to

matter—as mere ornament, stuck on to arrest incurious eyes, and not as effective expression—their sense of the deeper value of matter made them despise such aid. A clearer conception would have rectified this error. The matter is confluent with the manner; and only *through* the style can thought reach the reader's mind. If the manner is involved, awkward, abrupt, obscure, the reader will either be oppressed with a confused sense of cumbrous material which awaits an artist to give it shape, or he will have the labour thrown upon him of extricating the material and reshaping it in his own mind.

17. How entirely men misconceive the relation of style to thought may be seen in the replies they make when their writing is objected to, or in the ludicrous attempts of clumsy playfulness and tawdry eloquence when they wish to be regarded as writers.

“Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse,”<sup>1</sup>

and the principle of Sincerity, not less than the suggestions of taste, will preserve the integrity of each style. A philosopher, an investigator, an historian, or a moralist, so far from being required to present the graces of a wit, an essayist, a pamphleteer, or a novelist, would be warned off such ground by the necessity of expressing himself sincerely. Pascal, Biot, Buffon, or Laplace are examples of the clearness and beauty with which ideas may be presented wearing all the graces of fine literature, and losing none of the severity of science. Bacon, also, having an opulent and active intellect, spontaneously expressed himself in forms of various excellence. But what a pitiable contrast is presented by Kant! It is true that Kant having a much narrower range of sensibility could have no

<sup>1</sup> [The least noble of styles has nevertheless its own nobility.]

such ample resource of expression, and he was wise in not attempting to rival the splendour of the ‘*Novum Organum*’; but he was not simply unwise, he was extremely culpable in sending forth his thoughts as so much raw material which the public was invited to put into shape as it could. Had he been aware that much of his bad writing was imperfect thinking, and always imperfect adaption of means to ends, he might have been induced to recast it into more logical and more intelligible sentences, which would have stimulated the reader’s mind as much as they now oppress it. Nor had Kant the excuse of a subject too abstruse for clear presentation. The examples of Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume are enough to show how such subjects can be mastered, and the very implication of writing a book is that the writer has mastered his material and can give it intelligible form.

18. A grave treatise, dealing with a narrow range of subjects or moving amid severe abstractions, demands a gravity and severity of style which is dissimilar to that demanded by subjects of a wider scope or more impassioned impulse; but abstract philosophy has its appropriate elegance no less than mathematics. I do not mean that each subject should necessarily be confined to one special mode of treatment, in the sense which was understood when people spoke of the “dignity of history,” and so forth. The style must express the writer’s mind; and as variously constituted minds will treat one and the same subject, there will be varieties in their styles. If a severe thinker be also a man of wit, like Bacon, Hobbes, Pascal, or Galileo, the wit will flash its sudden illuminations on the argument; but if he be not a man of wit, and condescends to jest under the impres-

sion that by jesting he is giving an airy grace to his argument, we resent it as an impertinence.

**19.** I have throughout used Style in the narrower sense of expression rather than in the wider sense of "treatment" which is sometimes affixed to it. The mode of treating a subject is also no doubt the writer's or the artist's way of expressing what is in his mind, but this is Style in the more general sense, and does not admit of being reduced to laws apart from those of Vision and Sincerity. A man necessarily sees a subject in a particular light—ideal or grotesque, familiar or fanciful, tragic or humorous. He may wander into fairy-land, or move amid representative abstractions; he may follow his wayward fancy in its grotesque combinations, or he may settle down amid the homeliest details of daily life. But having chosen he must be true to his choice. He is not allowed to represent fairy-land as if it resembled Walworth, nor to paint Walworth in the colours of Venice. The truth of consistency must be preserved in his treatment, truth in art meaning of course only truth within the limits of the art; thus the painter may produce the utmost relief he can by means of light and shade, but it is peremptorily forbidden to use actual solidities on a plane surface. He must represent gold by colour, not by sticking gold on his figures.<sup>1</sup> Our applause is greatly determined by our sense of difficulty overcome, and to stick gold on a picture is an avoidance of the difficulty of painting it.

**20.** Truth of presentation has an inexplicable charm for us, and throws a halo around even ignoble objects. A

<sup>1</sup> This was done with *naïveté* by the early painters, and is really very effective in the pictures of Gentile da Fabriano—that Paul Veronese of the fifteenth century—as the reader will confess if he has seen the 'Adoration of the Magi,' in the Florence Academy; but it could not be tolerated now.

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policeman idly standing at the corner of the street, or a sow lazily sleeping against the sun, are not in nature objects to excite a thrill of delight, but a painter may, by the cunning of his art, represent them so as to delight every spectator. The same objects represented by an inferior painter will move only a languid interest; by a still more inferior painter they may be represented so as to please none but the most uncultivated eye. Each spectator is charmed in proportion to his recognition of a triumph over difficulty which is measured by the degree of verisimilitude. The degrees are many. In the lowest the pictured object is so remote from the reality that we simply recognise what the artist meant to represent. In like manner we recognize in poor novels and dramas what the authors mean to be characters, rather than what our experience of life suggests as characteristic.

**21.** Not only do we apportion our applause according to the degree of verisimilitude attained, but also according to the difficulty each involves. It is a higher difficulty, and implies a nobler art to represent the movement and complexity of life and emotion than to catch the fixed lineaments of outward aspects. To paint a policeman idly lounging at the street corner with such verisimilitude that we are pleased with the representation, admiring the solidity of the figure, the texture of the clothes, and the human aspect of the features, is so difficult that we loudly applaud the skill which enables an artist to imitate what in itself is uninteresting; and if the imitation be carried to a certain degree of verisimilitude the picture may be of immense value. But no excellence of representation can make this high art. To carry it into the region of high art, another and far greater difficulty must be overcome; the man must be represented under the strain of great emotion,

and we must recognize an equal truthfulness in the subtle indications of great mental agitation, the fleeting characters of which are far less easy to observe and to reproduce, than the stationary characters of form and costume. We may often observe how the novelist or dramatist has tolerable success so long as his personages are quiet, or moved only by the vulgar motives of ordinary life, and how fatally uninteresting, because unreal, these very personages become as soon as they are exhibited under the stress of emotion: their language ceases at once to be truthful, and becomes stagey; their conduct is no longer recognizable as that of human beings such as we have known. Here we note a defect of treatment, a mingling of styles, arising partly from defect of vision, and partly from an imperfect sincerity; and success in art will always be found dependent on integrity of style. The Dutch painters, so admirable in their own style, would become pitiable on quitting it for a higher.

**22.** But I need not enter at any length upon this subject of treatment. Obviously a work must have charm or it cannot succeed; and the charm will depend on very complex conditions in the artist's mind. What treatment is in Art, composition is in Philosophy. The general conception of the point of view, and the skilful distribution of the masses, so as to secure the due preparation, development, and culmination, without wasteful prodigality or confusing want of symmetry, constitute Composition, which is to the structure of a treatise what Style—in the narrower sense—is to the structure of sentences. How far Style is reducible to law will be examined in the next chapter.

## THE LAWS OF STYLE<sup>1</sup>

1. From what was said in the preceding chapter, the reader will understand that our present inquiry is only into the laws which regulate the mechanism of Style. In such an analysis all that constitutes the individuality, the life, the charm of a great writer, must escape. But we may dissect Style, as we dissect an organism, and lay bare the fundamental laws by which each is regulated. And this analogy may indicate the utility of our attempt; the grace and luminousness of a happy talent will no more be acquired by a knowledge of these laws, than the force and elasticity of a healthy organism will be given by a knowledge of anatomy; but the mistakes in Style, and the diseases of the organism, may be often avoided, and sometimes remedied, by such knowledge.

2. On a subject like this, which has for many years engaged the researches of many minds, I shall not be expected to bring forward discoveries; indeed, novelty would not unjustly be suspected of fallacy. The only claim my exposition can have on the reader's attention is that of being an attempt to systematize what has been hitherto either empirical observation, or the establishment of critical rules on a false basis. I know but of one exception to this sweeping censure, and that is the essay on the 'Philosophy of style,' by Mr. Herbert Spencer, where for the first time, I believe, the right method was pursued of seeking in psychological conditions for the true laws of expression.

<sup>1</sup> Chapter VI, of *The Principles of Success in Literature*.

3. The aims of Literature being instruction and delight, Style must in varying degrees appeal to our intellect and our sensibilities: sometimes reaching the intellect through the presentation of simple ideas, and at others through the agitating influence of emotions; sometimes awakening the sensibilities through the reflexes of ideas, and sometimes through a direct appeal. A truth may be nakedly expressed so as to stir the intellect alone; or it may be expressed in terms which, without disturbing its clearness, may appeal to our sensibility by their harmony or energy. It is not possible to distinguish the combined influences of clearness, movement, and harmony, so as to assign to each its relative effect; and if in the ensuing pages one law is isolated from another, this must be understood as an artifice inevitable in such investigations.

4. There are five laws under which all the conditions of Style may be grouped: 1. The Law of Economy. 2. The Law of Simplicity. 3. The Law of Sequence. 4. The Law of Climax. 5. The Law of Variety.

5. It would be easy to reduce these five to three, and range all considerations under Economy, Climax, and Variety; or we might amplify the divisions; but there are reasons of convenience as well as symmetry which give a preference to the five. I had arranged them thus for convenience some years ago, and I now find they express the equivalence of the two great factors of Style — Intelligence and Sensibility. Two out of the five, Economy and Simplicity, more specially derive their significance from intellectual needs; another two, Climax and Variety, from emotional needs; and between these is the Law of Sequence, which is intermediate in its nature, and may be claimed with equal justice by both. The laws of force and the laws of pleasure can only be provisionally isolated in our inquiry; in style

they are blended. The following brief estimate of each considers it as an isolated principle undetermined by any other.

#### I. — THE LAW OF ECONOMY

6. Our inquiry is scientific, not empirical; it therefore seeks the psychological basis for every law, endeavouring to ascertain what condition of a reader's receptivity determines the law. Fortunately for us, in the case of the first and most important law the psychological basis is extremely simple, and may be easily appreciated by a reference to its analogue in Mechanics.

7. What is the first object of a machine? Effective work — *vis viva*. Every means by which friction can be reduced, and the force thus economized be rendered available, necessarily solicits the constructor's care. He seeks as far as possible to liberate the motion which is absorbed in the working of the machine, and to use it as *vis viva*. He knows that every superfluous detail, every retarding influence, is at the cost of so much power, and is a mechanical defect though it may perhaps be an æsthetic beauty or a practical convenience. He may retain it because of the beauty, because of the convenience, but he knows the price of effective power at which it is obtained.

8. And thus it stands with Style. The first object of a writer is effective expression, the power of communicating distinct thoughts and emotional suggestions. He has to overcome the friction of ignorance and pre-occupation. He has to arrest a wandering attention, and to clear away the misconceptions which cling around verbal symbols. Words are not like iron and wood, coal and water, invariable in their properties, calculable in their effects. They are mutable in their powers, deriving force and suitable

variations of force from very trifling changes of position ; colouring and coloured by the words which precede and succeed ; significant or insignificant from the powers of rhythm and cadence. It is the writer's art so to arrange words that they shall suffer the least possible retardation from the inevitable friction of the reader's mind. The analogy of a machine is perfect. In both cases the object is to secure the maximum of disposable force, by diminishing the amount absorbed in the working. Obviously, if a reader is engaged in extricating the meaning from a sentence which ought to have reflected its meaning as in a mirror, the mental energy thus employed is abstracted from the amount of force which he has to bestow on the subject ; he has mentally to form anew the sentence which has been clumsily formed by the writer ; he wastes, on interpretation of the symbols, force which might have been concentrated on meditation of the propositions. This waste is inappreciable in writing of ordinary excellence, and on subjects not severely tasking to the attention ; but if inappreciable, it is always waste ; and in bad writing, especially on topics of philosophy and science, the waste is important. And it is this which greatly narrows the circle for serious works. Interest in the subjects treated of may not be wanting ; but the abundant energy is wanting which to the fatigue of consecutive thinking will add the labour of deciphering the language. Many of us are but too familiar with the fatigue of reconstructing unwieldy sentences in which the clauses are not logically dependent, nor the terms free from equivoque ; we know what it is to have to hunt for the meaning hidden in a maze of words ; and we can understand the yawning indifference which must soon settle upon every reader of such writing, unless he has some strong external impulse or abundant energy.

9. Economy dictates that the meaning should be presented in a form which claims the least possible attention to itself as form, unless when that form is part of the writer's object, and when the simple thought is less important than the manner of presenting it. And even when the manner is playful or impassioned, the law of Economy still presides, and insists on the rejection of whatever is superfluous. Only a delicate susceptibility can discriminate a superfluity in passages of humour or rhetoric ; but elsewhere a very ordinary understanding can recognize the clauses and the epithets which are out of place, and in excess, retarding or confusing the direct appreciation of the thought. If we have written a clumsy or confused sentence, we shall often find that the removal of an awkward inversion liberates the idea, or that the modification of a cadence increases the effect. This is sometimes strikingly seen at the rehearsal of a play : a passage which has fallen flat upon the ear is suddenly brightened into effectiveness by the removal of a superfluous phrase, which, by its retarding influence, had thwarted the declamatory crescendo.

10. Young writers may learn something of the secrets of Economy by careful revision of their own compositions, and by careful dissection of passages selected both from good and bad writers. They have simply to strike out every word, every clause, and every sentence, the removal of which will not carry away any of the constituent elements of the thought. Having done this, let them compare the revised with the unrevised passages, and see where the excision has improved, and where it has injured, the effect. For Economy, although a primal law, is not the only law of Style. It is subject to various limitations from the pressure of other laws ; and thus the removal of a trifling superfluity will not be justified by a wise economy if that loss

entails a dissonance, or prevents a climax, or robs the expression of its ease and variety. Economy is rejection of whatever is superfluous; it is not Miserliness. A liberal expenditure is often the best economy, and is always so when dictated by a generous impulse, not by a prodigal carelessness or ostentatious vanity. That man would greatly err who tried to make his style effective by stripping it of all redundancy and ornament, presenting it naked before the indifferent public. Perhaps the very redundancy which he lops away might have aided the reader to see the thought more clearly, because it would have kept the thought a little longer before his mind, and thus prevented him from hurrying on to the next while this one was still imperfectly conceived.

11. As a general rule, redundancy is injurious; and the reason of the rule will enable us to discriminate when redundancy is injurious and when beneficial. It is injurious when it hampers the rapid movement of the reader's mind, diverting his attention to some collateral detail. But it is beneficial when its retarding influence is such as only to detain the mind longer on the thought, and thus to secure the fuller effect of the thought. For rapid reading is often imperfect reading. The mind is satisfied with a glimpse of that which it ought to have steadily contemplated; and any artifice by which the thought can be kept long enough before the mind, may indeed be a redundancy as regards the meaning, but is an economy of power. Thus we see that the phrase or the clause which we might be tempted to lop away because it threw no light upon the proposition, would be retained by a skilful writer because it added power. You may know the character of a redundancy by this one test: does it divert the attention, or simply retard it? The former is always a loss of power:

the latter is sometimes a gain of power. The art of the writer consists in rejecting all redundancies that do not conduce to clearness. The shortest sentences are not necessarily the clearest. Concision gives energy, but it also adds restraint. The labour of expanding a terse sentence to its full meaning is often greater than the labour of picking out the meaning from a diffuse and loitering passage. Tacitus is more tiresome than Cicero.

**12.** There are occasions when the simplest and fewest words surpass in effect all the wealth of rhetorical amplification. An example may be seen in the passage which has been a favourite illustration from the days of Longinus to our own. “God said: Let there be light! and there was light.” This is a conception of power so calm and simple that it needs only to be presented in the fewest and the plainest words, and would be confused or weakened by any suggestion of accessories. Let us amplify the expressions in the redundant style of miscalled eloquent writers: “God, in the magnificent fulness of creative energy, exclaimed: Let there be light! and lo! the agitating fiat immediately went forth, and thus in one indivisible moment the whole universe was illumined.” We have here a sentence which I am certain many a writer would, in secret, prefer to the masterly plainness of Genesis. It is not a sentence which would have captivated critics.

**13.** Although this sentence from Genesis is sublime in its simplicity, we are not to conclude that simple sentences are uniformly the best, or that a style composed of propositions briefly expressed would obey a wise Economy. The reader’s pleasure must not be forgotten; and he cannot be pleased by a style which always leaps and never flows. A harsh, abrupt, and dislocated manner irritates and perplexes him by its sudden jerks. It is easier to

write short sentences than to read them. An easy, fluent, and harmonious phrase steals unobtrusively upon the mind, and allows the thought to expand quietly like an opening flower. But the very suasiveness of harmonious writing needs to be varied lest it become a drowsy monotony; and the sharp, short sentences which are intolerable when abundant, when used sparingly act like a trumpet-call to the drooping attention.

## II. — THE LAW OF SIMPLICITY

14. The first obligation of Economy is that of using the fewest words to secure the fullest effect. It rejects whatever is superfluous; but the question of superfluity must, as I showed just now, be determined in each individual case by various conditions too complex and numerous to be reduced within a formula. The same may be said of Simplicity, which is indeed so intimately allied with Economy that I have only given it a separate station for purposes of convenience. The psychological basis is the same for both. The desire for simplicity is impatience at superfluity, and the impatience arises from a sense of hindrance.

15. The first obligation of Simplicity is that of using the simplest means to secure the fullest effect. But although the mind instinctively rejects all needless complexity, we shall greatly err if we fail to recognize the fact, that what the mind recoils from is not the complexity, but the needlessness. When two men are set to the work of one, there is a waste of means; when two phrases are used to express one meaning twice, there is a waste of power; when incidents are multiplied and illustrations crowded without increase of illumination, there is a prodigality which only

the vulgar can mistake for opulence. Simplicity is a relative term. If in sketching the head of a man the artist wishes only to convey the general characteristics of that head, the fewest touches show the greatest power, selecting as they do only those details which carry with them characteristic significance. The means are simple, as the effect is simple. But if, besides the general characteristics, he wishes to convey the modelling of the forms, the play of light and shade, the textures, and the very complex effect of a human head, he must use more complex means. The simplicity which was adequate in the one case becomes totally inadequate in the other.

16. Obvious as this is, it has not been sufficiently present to the mind of critics who have called for plain, familiar, and concrete diction, as if that alone could claim to be simple; who have demanded a style unadorned by the artifices of involution, cadence, imagery, and epigram, as if Simplicity were incompatible with these; and have praised meagreness, mistaking it for Simplicity. Saxon words are words which in their homeliness have deep-seated power, and in some places they are the simplest because the most powerful words we can employ; but their very homeliness excludes them from certain places where their very power of suggestion is a disturbance of the general effect. The selective instinct of the artist tells him when his language should be homely, and when it should be more elevated; and it is precisely in the imperceptible blending of the plain with the ornate that a great writer is distinguished. He uses the simplest phrases without triviality, and the grandest without a suggestion of grandiloquence.

17. Simplicity of Style will therefore be understood as meaning absence of needless superfluity:

"Without o'erflowing full."

Its plainness is never meagreness, but unity. Obedient to the primary impulse of *adequate* expression, the style of a complex subject should be complex ; of a technical subject, technical ; of an abstract subject, abstract ; of a familiar subject, familiar ; of a pictorial subject, picturesque. The structure of the 'Antigone' is simple ; but so also is the structure of 'Othello,' though it contains many more elements ; the simplicity of both lies in their fulness without superfluity.

18. Whatever is outside the purpose, or the feeling, of a scene, a speech, a sentence, or a phrase, whatever may be omitted without sacrifice of effect, is a sin against this law. I do not say that the incident, description, or dialogue, which may be omitted without injury to the unity of the work, is necessarily a sin against art ; still less that, even when acknowledged as a sin, it may not sometimes be condoned by its success. The law of Simplicity is not the only law of art ; and, moreover, audiences are, unhappily, so little accustomed to judge works as wholes, and so ready to seize upon any detail which pleases them, no matter how incongruously the detail may be placed, that a felicitous fault will captivate applause, let critics shake reproving heads as they may. Nevertheless the law of Simplicity remains unshaken, and ought only to give way to the pressure of the law of Variety.

19. The drama offers a good opportunity for studying the operation of this law, because the limitations of time compel the dramatist to attend closely to what is and what is not needful for his purpose. A drama must compress into two or three hours material which may be diffused through three volumes of a novel, because spectators are more impatient than readers, and more unequivocally resent

by their signs of weariness any disregard of economy, which in the novel may be skipped. The dramatist having little time in which to evolve his story feels that every scene which does not forward the progress of the action or intensify the interest in the characters is an artistic defect; though in itself it may be charmingly written, and may excite applause, it is away from his immediate purpose. And what is true of purposeless scenes and characters which divert the current of progress, is equally true, in a minor degree, of speeches and sentences which arrest the culminating interest by calling attention away to other objects. It is an error which arises from a deficient earnestness on the writer's part, or from a too pliant facility. The *dramatis personæ* wander in their dialogue, not swayed by the fluctuations of feeling, but by the author's desire to show his wit and wisdom, or else by his want of power to control the vagrant suggestions of his fancy. The desire for display and the inability to control are weaknesses that lead to almost every transgression of Simplicity; but sometimes the transgressions are made in more or less conscious obedience to the law of Variety, although the highest reach of art is to secure variety by an opulent simplicity.

**20.** The novelist is not under the same limitations of time, nor has he to contend against the same mental impatience on the part of his public. He may therefore linger where the dramatist must hurry; he may digress, and gain fresh impetus from the digression, where the dramatist would seriously endanger the effect of his scene by retarding its evolution. The novelist with a prudent prodigality may employ descriptions, dialogues, and episodes, which would be fatal in a drama. Characters may be introduced and dismissed without having any important connection with the plot; it is enough if they serve the purpose of the

chapter in which they appear. Although as a matter of fine art no character should have a place in a novel unless it form an integral element of the story, and no episode should be introduced unless it reflects some strong light on the characters or incidents, this is a critical demand which only fine artists think of satisfying, and only delicate tastes appreciate. For the mass of readers it is enough if they are amused; and indeed all readers, no matter how critical their taste, would rather be pleased by a transgression of the law than wearied by prescription. Delight condones offence. The only question for the writer is, whether the offence is so trivial as to be submerged in the delight. And he will do well to remember that the greater flexibility belonging to the novel by no means removes the novel from the laws which rule the drama. The parts of a novel should have organic relations. Push the licence to excess, and stitch together a volume of unrelated chapters—a patch-work of descriptions, dialogues, and incidents,—no one will call that a novel; and the less the work has of this unorganized character the greater will be its value, not only in the eyes of critics, but in its effect on the emotions of the reader.

**21.** Simplicity of structure means organic unity, whether the organism be simple or complex; and hence in all times the emphasis which critics have laid upon Simplicity, though they have not unfrequently confounded it with narrowness of range. In like manner, as we said just now, when treating of diction they have overlooked the fact that the simplest must be that which best expresses the thought. Simplicity of diction is integrity of speech; that which admits of least equivocation, that which by the clearest verbal symbols most readily calls up in the reader's mind the images and feelings which the writer wishes to call up. Such diction may be concrete or abstract, familiar or tech-

nical ; its simplicity is determined by the nature of the thought. We shall often be simpler in using abstract and technical terms than in using concrete and familiar terms which by their very concreteness and familiarity call up images and feelings foreign to our immediate purpose. If we desire the attention to fall upon some general idea, we only blur its outlines by using words that call up particulars. Thus, although it may be needful to give some definite direction to the reader's thoughts by the suggestion of a particular fact, we must be careful not to arrest his attention on the fact itself, still less to divert it by calling up vivid images of facts unrelated to our present purpose. For example, I wish to fix in the reader's mind a conception of a lonely meditative man walking on the seashore, and I fall into the vicious style of our day which is lauded as word-painting, and write something like this :

22. "The fishermen mending their storm-beaten boats upon the shore would lay down the hammer to gaze after him as he passed abstractedly before their huts, his hair streaming in the salt breeze, his feet crushing the scattered seaweed, his eyes dreamily fixed upon the purple heights of the precipitous crags."

23. Now it is obvious that the details here assembled are mostly foreign to my purpose, which has nothing whatever to do with fishermen, storms, boats, seaweeds, or purple crags ; and by calling up images of these I only divert the attention from my thought. Whereas, if it had been my purpose to picture the scene itself, or the man's delight in it, then the enumeration of details would give colour and distinctness to the picture.

24. The art of a great writer is seen in the perfect fitness of his expressions. He knows how to blend vividness with vagueness, knows where images are needed, and where

by their vivacity they would be obstacles to the rapid appreciation of his thought. The value of concrete illustration artfully used may be seen illustrated in a passage from Macaulay's invective against Frederic the Great: "On the head of Frederic is all the blood which was shed in a war which raged during many years and in every quarter of the globe, the blood of the column at Fontenoy, the blood of the mountaineers who were slaughtered at Culloden. The evils produced by his wickedness were felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown; and in order that he might rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America." Disregarding the justice or injustice of the thought, note the singular force and beauty of this passage, delightful alike to ear and mind; and observe how its very elaborateness has the effect of the finest simplicity, because the successive pictures are constituents of the general thought, and by their vividness render the conclusion more impressive. Let us suppose him to have written with the vague generality of expression much patronized by dignified historians, and told us that "Frederic was the cause of great European conflicts extending over long periods; and in consequence of his political aggression hideous crimes were perpetrated in the most distant parts of the globe." This absence of concrete images would not have been simplicity, inasmuch as the labour of converting the general expressions into definite meanings would thus have been thrown upon the reader.

**25.** Pictorial illustration has its dangers, as we daily see in the clumsy imitators of Macaulay, who have not the fine instinct of style, but obey the vulgar instinct of display, and imagine they can produce a brilliant effect by the use

of strong lights, whereas they distract the attention with images alien to the general impression, just as crude colourists vex the eye with importunate splendours. Nay, even good writers sometimes sacrifice the large effect of a diffusive light to the small effect of a brilliant point. This is a defect of taste frequently noticeable in two very good writers, De Quincey and Ruskin, whose command of expression is so varied that it tempts them into *fioritura* as flexibility of voice tempts singers to sin against simplicity. At the close of an eloquent passage De Quincey writes :

26. "Gravitation, again, that works without holiday for ever, and searches every corner of the universe, what intellect can follow it to its fountain? And yet, shyer than gravitation, less to be counted than the fluxions of sun-dials, stealthier than the growth of a forest, are the footsteps of Christianity amongst the political workings of man."

27. The association of holidays and shyness with an idea so abstract as that of gravitation, the use of the learned word fluxions to express the movements of the shadows on a dial, and the discordant suggestion of stealthiness applied to vegetable growth and Christianity, are so many offences against simplicity. Let the passage be contrasted with one in which wealth of imagery is in accordance with the thought it expresses :

28. "In the edifices of Man there should be found reverent worship and following, not only of the spirit which rounds the pillars of the forest, and arches the vault of the avenue — which gives veining to the leaf and polish to the shell, and grace to every pulse that agitates animal organization — but of that also which reproves the pillars of the earth, and builds up her barren precipices into the coldness of the clouds, and lifts her shadowy cones of mountain purple into the pale arch of the sky ; for these, and other glo-

ries more than these, refuse not to connect themselves, in his thoughts, with the work of his own hand ; the grey cliff loses not its nobleness when it reminds us of some Cyclopean waste of mural stone ; the pinnacles of the rocky promontory arrange themselves, undegraded, into fantastic semblances of fortress towers, and even the awful cone of the far-off mountain has a melancholy mixed with that of its own solitude, which is cast from the images of nameless tumuli on white sea-shores, and of the heaps of reedy clay, into which chambered cities melt in their mortality."

29. I shall notice but two points in this singularly beautiful passage. The one is the exquisite instinct of Sequence in several of the phrases, not only as to harmony, but as to the evolution of the meaning, especially in "builds up her barren precipices into the coldness of the clouds, and lifts her shadowy cones of mountain purple into the pale arch of the sky." The other is the injurious effect of three words in the sentence, "for these and other glories more than these, *refuse not to* connect themselves, in his thoughts." Strike out the words printed in italics, and you not only improve the harmony, but free the sentence from a disturbing use of what Ruskin has named the "pathetic fallacy." There are times in which Nature may be assumed as in sympathy with our moods ; and at such times the pathetic fallacy is a source of subtle effect. But in the passage just quoted the introduction seems to me a mistake : the simplicity of the thought is disturbed by this hint of an active participation of Nature in man's feelings ; it is preserved in its integrity by the omission of that hint.

30. These illustrations will suffice to show how the law we are considering will command and forbid the use of concrete expressions and vivid imagery according to the purpose of the writer. A fine taste guided by Sincerity will

determine that use. Nothing more than a general rule can be laid down. Eloquence, as I said before, cannot spring from the simple desire to be eloquent; the desire usually leads to grandiloquence. But Sincerity will save us. We have but to remember Montesquieu's advice: "Il faut prendre garde aux grandes phrases dans les humbles sujets; elles produisent l'effet d'une masque à barbe blanche sur la joue d'un enfant."<sup>1</sup>

31. Here another warning may be placed. In our anxiety lest we err on the side of grandiloquence, we may perhaps fall into the opposite error of tameness. Sincerity will save us here also. Let us but express the thought and feeling actually in our minds, then our very grandiloquence (if that is our weakness) will have a certain movement and vivacity not without effect, and our tameness (if we are tame) will have a gentleness not without its charm.

32. Finally, let us banish from our critical superstitions the notion that chastity of composition, or simplicity of Style, is in any respect allied to timidity. There are two kinds of timidity, or rather it has two different origins, both of which cripple the free movement of thought. The one is the timidity of fastidiousness, the other of placid stupidity: the one shrinks from originality lest it should be regarded as impertinent; the other lest, being new, it should be wrong. We detect the one in the sensitive discreetness of the style. We detect the other in the complacency of its platitudes and the stereotyped commonness of its metaphors. The writer who is afraid of originality feels himself in deep water when he launches into a commonplace. For him who is timid because weak, there is no advice, except suggesting the propriety

<sup>1</sup> [One must guard against big phrases in humble subjects; they produce the effect of a false white beard on the chin of a child.]

of silence. For him who is timid because fastidious, there is this advice: get rid of the superstition about chastity, and recognize the truth that a style may be simple, even if it move amid abstractions, or employ few Saxon words, or abound in concrete images and novel turns of expression.

### III.—THE LAW OF SEQUENCE

33. Much that might be included under this head would equally well find its place under that of Economy or that of Climax. Indeed it is obvious that to secure perfect Economy there must be that sequence of the words which will present the least obstacle to the unfolding of the thought, and that Climax is only attainable through a properly graduated sequence. But there is another element we have to take into account, and that is the rhythmical effect of Style. Mr. Herbert Spencer in his essay very clearly states the law of Sequence, but I infer that he would include it entirely under the law of Economy; at any rate he treats of it solely in reference to intelligibility, and not at all in its scarcely less important relation to harmony. “We have *a priori* reasons,” he says, “for believing that in every sentence there is some one order of words more effective than any other; and that this order is the one which presents the elements of the proposition in the succession in which they may be most readily put together. As in a narrative, the events should be stated in such sequence that the mind may not have to go backwards and forwards in order to rightly connect them; as in a group of sentences, the arrangement should be such, that each of them may be understood when it comes, without waiting for subsequent ones; so in every sentence, the sequence of words should be that which suggests the constituents of

the thought in the order most convenient for the building up that thought."

34. But Style appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect, and the arrangement of words and sentences which will be the most economical may not be the most musical, and the most musical may not be the most pleasurable effective. For Climax and Variety it may be necessary to sacrifice something of rapid intelligibility: hence involutions, antitheses, and suspensions, which disturb the most orderly arrangement, may yet, in virtue of their own subtle influences, be counted as improvements on that arrangement.

35. Tested by the Intellect and the Feelings, the law of Sequence is seen to be a curious compound of the two. If we isolate these elements for the purposes of exposition, we shall find that the principle of the first is much simpler and more easy of obedience than the principle of the second. It may be thus stated :

36. The constituent elements of the conception expressed in the sentence and the paragraph should be arranged in strict correspondence with an inductive or a deductive progression.

37. All exposition, like all research, is either inductive or deductive. It groups particulars so as to lead up to a general conception which embraces them all, but which could not be fully understood until they had been estimated; or else it starts from some general conception, already familiar to the mind, and as it moves along, casts its light upon numerous particulars, which are thus shown to be related to it, but which without that light would have been overlooked.

38. If the reader will meditate on that brief statement of the principle, he will, I think, find it explains many doubt-

ful points. Let me merely notice one, namely, the dispute as to whether the direct or the indirect style should be preferred. Some writers insist, and others practise the precept without insistence, that the proposition should be stated first, and all its qualifications as well as its evidences be made to follow; others maintain that the proposition should be made to grow up step by step with all its evidences and qualifications in their due order, and the conclusion disclose itself as crowning the whole. Are not both methods right under different circumstances? If my object is to convince you of a general truth, or to impress you with a feeling, which you are not already prepared to accept, it is obvious that the most effective method is the inductive, which leads your mind upon a culminating wave of evidence or emotion to the very point I aim at. But the deductive method is best when I wish to direct the light of familiar truths and roused emotions, upon new particulars, or upon details in unsuspected relation to those truths; and when I wish the attention to be absorbed by these particulars which are of interest in themselves, not upon the general truths which are of no present interest except in as far as they light up these details. A growing thought requires the inductive exposition, an applied thought the deductive.

**39.** This principle, which is of very wide application, is subject to two important qualifications—one pressed on it by the necessities of Climax and Variety, the other by the feebleness of memory, which cannot keep a long hold of details unless their significance is apprehended; so that a paragraph of suspended meaning should never be long, and when the necessities of the case bring together numerous particulars in evidence of the conclusion, they should be so arranged as to have culminating force: one clause leading

up to another, and throwing its impetus into it, instead of being linked on to another, and dragging the mind down with its weight.

40. It is surprising how few men understand that Style is a Fine Art; and how few of those who are fastidious in their diction give much care to the arrangement of their sentences, paragraphs, and chapters—in a word, to Composition. The painter distributes his masses with a view to general effect; so does the musician: writers seldom do so. Nor do they usually arrange the members of their sentences in that sequence which shall secure for each its proper emphasis and its determining influence on the others—*influence reflected back and influence projected forward*. As an example of the charm that lies in unostentatious antiphony, consider this passage from Ruskin:—“Originality in expression does not depend on invention of new words; nor originality in poetry on invention of new measures; nor in painting on invention of new colours or new modes of using them. The chords of music, the harmonies of colour, the general principles of the arrangement of sculptural masses, have been determined long ago, and in all probability cannot be added to any more than they can be altered.” Men write like this by instinct; and I by no means wish to suggest that writing like this can be produced by rule. What I suggest is, that in this, as in every other Fine Art, instinct does mostly find itself in accordance with rule; and a knowledge of rules helps to direct the blind gropings of feeling, and to correct the occasional mistakes of instinct. If, after working his way through a long and involved sentence in which the meaning is rough hewn, the writer were to try its effect upon ear and intellect, he might see its defects and re-shape it into beauty and clearness. But in general men shirk this labour,

partly because it is irksome, and partly because they have no distinct conception of the rules which would make the labour light.

**41.** The law of Sequence, we have seen, rests upon the two requisites of Clearness and Harmony. Men with a delicate sense of rhythm will instinctively distribute their phrases in an order that falls agreeably on the ear, without monotony, and without an echo of other voices ; and men with a keen sense of logical relation will instinctively arrange their sentences in an order that best unfolds the meaning. The French are great masters of the law of Sequence, and, did space permit, I could cite many excellent examples. One brief passage from Royer Collard must suffice :—“ Les faits que l’observation laisse épars et muets la causalité les rassemble, les enchaîne, leur prête un langage. Chaque fait révèle celui qui a précédé, prophétise celui qui va suivre.”<sup>1</sup>

**42.** The ear is only a guide to the harmony of a period, and often tempts us into the feebleness of expletives or approximative expressions for the sake of a cadence. Yet, on the other hand, if we disregard the subtle influences of harmonious arrangement, our thoughts lose much of the force which would otherwise result from their logical subordination. The easy evolution of thought in a melodious period, quietly taking up on its way a variety of incidental details, yet never lingering long enough over them to divert the attention or to suspend the continuous crescendo of interest, but by subtle influences of proportion allowing each clause of the sentence its separate significance, is the product of a natural gift, as rare as the gift of music, or of

<sup>1</sup> [Causality gathers together, binds, and lends a language to the facts which mere observation leaves scattered and dumb. Each fact reveals that which has gone before and foretells that which is to come.]

poetry. But until men come to understand that Style is an art, and an amazingly difficult art, they will continue with careless presumption to tumble out their sentences as they would lilt stones from a cart, trusting very much to accident or gravitation for the shapeliness of the result. I will write a passage which may serve as an example of what I mean, although the defect is purposely kept within very ordinary limits :

**43.** “To construct a sentence with many loosely and not obviously dependent clauses, each clause containing an important meaning or a concrete image the vivacity of which, like a boulder in a shallow stream, disturbs the equable current of thought,—and in such a case the more beautiful the image the greater the obstacle, so that the laws of simplicity and economy are violated by it,—while each clause really requires for its interpretation a proposition that is however kept suspended till the close,—is a defect.”

**44.** The weariness produced by such writing as this is very great, and yet the recasting of the passage is easy. Thus :

**45.** “It is a defect when a sentence is constructed with many loosely and not obviously dependent clauses, each of which requires for its interpretation a proposition that is kept suspended till the close ; and this defect is exaggerated when each clause contains an important meaning, or a concrete image which, like a boulder in a shallow stream, disturbs the equable current of thought : the more beautiful the image, the greater its violation of the laws of simplicity and economy.”

**46.** In this second form the sentence has no long suspension of the main idea, no diversions of the current. The proposition is stated and illustrated directly, and the mind

of the reader follows that of the writer. How injurious it is to keep the key in your pocket until all the locks in succession have been displayed may be seen in such a sentence as this :

47. "Phantoms of lost power, sudden intuitions, and shadowy restorations of forgotten feelings, sometimes dim and perplexing, sometimes by bright but furtive glimpses, sometimes by a full and steady revelation overcharged with light—throw us back in a moment upon scenes and remembrances that we have left full thirty years behind us."

48. Had De Quincey liberated our minds from suspense by first presenting the thought which first arose in his own mind,—namely, that we are thrown back upon scenes and remembrances by phantoms of lost power, etc.—the beauty of his language in its pregnant suggestiveness would have been felt at once. Instead of that, he makes us accompany him in darkness, and when the light appears we have to travel backward over the ground again to see what we have passed. The passage continues :

49. "In solitude, and chiefly in the solitudes of nature, and, above all, amongst the great and enduring features of nature, such as mountains and quiet dells, and the lawny recesses of forests, and the silent shores of lakes, features with which (as being themselves less liable to change) our feelings have a more abiding association — under these circumstances it is, that such evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are most apt to startle and to waylay us."

50. The beauty of this passage seems to me marred by the awkward yet necessary interruption, "under these circumstances it is," which would have been avoided by opening the sentence with "such evanescent hauntings of our

forgotten selves are most apt to startle us in solitudes," etc. Compare the effect of directness in the following :

51. "This was one, and the most common shape of extinguished power, from which Coleridge fled to the great city. But sometimes the same decay came back upon his heart in the more poignant shape of intimations, and vanishing glimpses, recovered for one moment from the paradise of youth, and from the fields of joy and power, over which for him, too certainly, he felt that the cloud of night had settled for ever."

52. Obedience to the law of Sequence gives strength by giving clearness and beauty of rhythm ; it economizes force and creates music. A very trifling disregard of it will mar an effect. See an example both of obedience and trifling disobedience in the following passage from Ruskin :

53. "People speak in this working age, when they speak from their hearts, as if houses and lands, and food and raiment were alone useful, and as if Sight, Thought, and Admiration were all profitless, so that men insolently call themselves Utilitarians, who would turn, if they had their way, themselves and their race into vegetables ; men who think, as far as such can be said to think, that the meat is more than the life and the raiment than the body, who look to the earth as a stable and to its fruit as fodder ; vinedressers and husbandmen, who love the corn they grind, and the grapes they crush, better than the gardens of the angels upon the slopes of Eden."

54. It is instructive to contrast the dislocated sentence, "who would turn, if they had their way, themselves and their race," with the sentence which succeeds it, "men who think, as far as such can be said to think, that the meat," etc. In the latter the parenthetic interruption is a source of power : it dams the current to increase its force ; in the

former the inversion is a loss of power : it is a dissonance to the ear and a diversion of the thought.

55. As illustrations of Sequence in composition, two passages may be quoted from Macaulay which display the power of pictorial suggestions when, instead of diverting attention from the main purpose, they are arranged with progressive and culminating effect.

56. "Such or nearly such was the change which passed on the Mogul empire during the forty years which followed the death of Aurungzebe. A succession of nominal sovereigns, sunk in indolence and debauchery, sauntered away life in secluded palaces, chewing bang, fondling concubines, and listening to buffoons. A succession of ferocious invaders descended through the western passes, to prey on the defenceless wealth of Hindostan. A Persian conqueror crossed the Indus, marched through the gates of Delhi, and bore away in triumph those treasures of which the magnificence had astounded Roe and Bernier, the Peacock Throne, on which the richest jewels of Golconda had been disposed by the most skilful hands of Europe, and the inestimable Mountain of Light, which, after many strange vicissitudes, lately shone in the bracelet of Runjeet Sing, and is now destined to adorn the hideous idol of Orissa. The Afghan soon followed to complete the work of devastation which the Persian had begun. The warlike tribes of Rajpootana threw off the Mussulman yoke. A band of mercenary soldiers occupied Rohilcund. The Seiks ruled on the Indus. The Jauts spread dismay along the Jumnah. The high lands which border on the western sea-coast of India poured forth a yet more formidable race, a race which was long the terror of every native power, and which, after many desperate and doubtful struggles, yielded only to the fortune and genius of England. It was under the reign of Aurung-

zebe that this wild clan of plunderers first descended from their mountains ; and soon after his death, every corner of his wide empire learned to tremble at the mighty name of the Mahrattas. Many fertile viceroyalties were entirely subdued by them. Their dominions stretched across the peninsula from sea to sea. Mahratta captains reigned at Poonah, at Gualior, in Guzerat, in Berar, and in Tanjore."

57. Such prose as this affects us like poetry. The pictures and suggestions might possibly have been gathered together by any other historian ; but the artful succession, the perfect sequence, could only have been found by a fine writer. I pass over a few paragraphs, and pause at this second example of a sentence simple in structure, though complex in its elements, fed but not overfed with material, and almost perfect in its cadence and logical connection. "Scarcely any man, however sagacious, would have thought it possible that a trading company, separated from India by fifteen thousand miles of sea, and possessing in India only a few acres for purposes of commerce, would, in less than a hundred years, spread its empire from Cape Comorin to the eternal snow of the Himalayas ; would compel Mahratta and Mahomedan to forget their mutual feuds in common subjection ; would tame down even those wild races which had resisted the most powerful of the Moguls ; and having united under its laws a hundred millions of subjects, would carry its victorious arms far to the east of the Burram-pooter, and far to the west of the Hydaspes, dictate terms of peace at the gates of Ava, and seat its vassal on the throne of Candahar."

58. Let us see the same principle exhibited in a passage at once pictorial and argumentative. "We know more certainly every day," says Ruskin, "that whatever appears to us harmful in the universe has some beneficent or neces-

sary operation; that the storm which destroys a harvest brightens the sunbeams for harvests yet unsown, and that the volcano which buries a city preserves a thousand from destruction. But the evil is not for the time less fearful, because we have learned it to be necessary; and we easily understand the timidity or the tenderness of the spirit which would withdraw itself from the presence of destruction, and create in its imagination a world of which the peace should be unbroken, in which the sky should not darken nor the sea rage, in which the leaf should not change nor the blossom wither. That man is greater, however, who contemplates with an equal mind the alternations of terror and of beauty; who, not rejoicing less beneath the sunny sky, can bear also to watch the bars of twilight narrowing on the horizon; and, not less sensible to the blessing of the peace of nature, can rejoice in the magnificence of the ordinances by which that peace is protected and secured. But separated from both by an immeasurable distance would be the man who delighted in convulsion and disease for their own sake; who found his daily food in the disorder of nature mingled with the suffering of humanity; and watched joyfully at the right hand of the Angel whose appointed work is to destroy as well as to accuse, while the corners of the House of feasting were struck by the wind from the wilderness."

59. I will now cite a passage from Burke, which will seem tame after the pictorial animation of the passages from Macaulay and Ruskin; but which, because it is simply an exposition of opinions addressed to the understanding, will excellently illustrate the principle I am enforcing. He is treating of the dethronement of kings. "As it was not made for common abuses, so it is not to be agitated by common minds. The speculative line of demarcation, where

obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event, which determines it. Governments must be abused and deranged indeed, before it can be thought of ; and the prospect of the future must be as bad as the experience of the past. When things are in that lamentable condition, the nature of the disease is to indicate the remedy to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities this critical, ambiguous, bitter potion to a distempered state. Times and occasions, and provocations, will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case ; the irritable from sensibility to oppression ; the high-minded from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands ; the brave and bold from the love of honourable danger in a generous cause : but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good."

60. As a final example I will cite a passage from M. Taine :—“De là encore cette insolence contre les inférieurs, et ce mépris versé d'étage en étage depuis le premier jusqu'au dernier. Lorsque dans une société la loi consacre les conditions inégales, personne n'est exempt d'insulte ; le grand seigneur, outragé par le roi, outrage le noble qui outrage le peuple ; la nature humaine est humilié à tous les étages, et la société n'est plus qu'un commerce d'affronts.”<sup>1</sup>

61. The law of Sequence by no means prescribes that we should invariably state the proposition before its qualifications — the thought before its illustrations ; it merely

<sup>1</sup> [Hence still comes that insolence toward inferiors and the despite handed on, in a succession of stages, from the first to the last. Whenever in any society, the law cherishes unequal conditions, nobody is free from insult : the *grand seigneur*, outraged by the king, insults the noble who, in turn, does violence to the people ; human nature in all degrees is humiliated and society is only an exchange of affronts.]

prescribes that we should arrange our phrases in the order of logical dependence and rhythmical cadence, the order best suited for clearness and for harmony. The nature of the thought will determine the one, our sense of euphony the other.

#### IV. — THE LAW OF CLIMAX

62. We need not pause long over this; it is generally understood. The condition of our sensibilities is such that to produce their effect stimulants must be progressive in intensity and varied in kind. On this condition rest the laws of Climax and Variety. The phrase or image which in one position will have a mild power of occupying the thoughts, or stimulating the emotions, loses this power if made to succeed one of like kind but more agitating influence, and will gain an accession of power if it be artfully placed on the wave of a climax. We laugh at

“Then came Dalhousie, that great God of War,  
Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Mar,”

because of the relaxation which follows the sudden tension of the mind; but if we remove the idea of the colonelcy from this position of anti-climax, the same couplet becomes energetic rather than ludicrous :

“Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Mar,  
Then came Dalhousie, that great God of War.”

<sup>7</sup> I have selected this strongly marked case, instead of several feeble passages which might be chosen from the first book at hand, wherein carelessness allows the sentences to close with the least important phrases, and the style droops under frequent anti-climax. Let me now cite a passage from Macaulay which vividly illustrates the effect of Climax:

**63.** "Never, perhaps, was the change which the progress of civilization has produced in the art of war more strikingly illustrated than on that day. Ajax beating down the Trojan leader with a rock which two ordinary men could scarcely lift, Horatius defending the bridge against an army, Richard, the Lion-hearted, spurring along the whole Saracen line without finding an enemy to withstand his assault, Robert Bruce crushing with one blow the helmet and head of Sir Henry Bohun in sight of the whole array of England and Scotland, such are the heroes of a dark age. [Here is an example of suspended meaning, where the suspense intensifies the effect, because each particular is vividly apprehended in itself, and all culminate in the conclusion; they do not complicate the thought, or puzzle us, they only heighten expectation.] In such an age bodily vigour is the most indispensable qualification of a warrior. At Landen two poor sickly beings, who, in a rude state of society, would have been regarded as too puny to bear any part in combats, were the souls of two great armies. In some heathen countries they would have been exposed while infants. In Christendom they would, six hundred years earlier, have been sent to some quiet cloister. But their lot had fallen on a time when men had discovered that the strength of the muscles is far inferior in value to the strength of the mind. It is probable that, among the hundred and twenty thousand soldiers who were marshalled round Neerwinden under all the standards of Western Europe, the two feeblest in body were the hunch-backed dwarf, who urged forward the fiery onset of France, and the asthmatic skeleton who covered the slow retreat of England."

**64.** The effect of Climax is very marked in the drama. Every speech, every scene, every act, should have its pro-

gressive sequence. Nothing can be more injudicious than a trivial phrase following an energetic phrase, a feeble thought succeeding a burst of passion, or even a passionate thought succeeding one more passionate. Yet this error is frequently committed.

65. In the drama all laws of Style are more imperious than in fiction or prose of any kind, because the art is more intense. But Climax is demanded in every species of composition, for it springs from a psychological necessity. It is pressed upon, however, by the law of Variety in a way to make it far from safe to be too rigidly followed. It easily degenerates into monotony.

#### V. — THE LAW OF VARIETY

66. Some one, after detailing an elaborate recipe for a salad, wound up the enumeration of ingredients and quantities with the advice to "open the window and throw it all away." This advice might be applied to the foregoing enumeration of the laws of Style, unless these were supplemented by the important law of Variety. A style which rigidly interpreted the precepts of economy, simplicity, sequence, and climax, which rejected all superfluous words and redundant ornaments, adopted the easiest and most logical arrangement, and closed every sentence and every paragraph with a climax, might be a very perfect bit of mosaic, but would want the glow and movement of a living mind. Monotony would settle on it like a paralyzing frost. A series of sentences in which every phrase was a distinct thought, would no more serve as pabulum for the mind, than portable soup freed from all the fibrous tissues of meat and vegetable would serve as food for the body. Animals perish from hunger in the presence of pure albu-

men ; and minds would lapse into idiocy in the presence of unadulterated thought. But without invoking extreme cases, let us simply remember the psychological fact that it is as easy for sentences to be too compact as for food to be too concentrated ; and that many a happy negligence, which to microscopic criticism may appear defective, will be the means of giving clearness and grace to a style. Of course the indolent indulgence in this laxity robs style of all grace and power. But monotony in the structure of sentences, monotony of cadence, monotony of climax, monotony anywhere, necessarily defeats the very aim and end of style ; it calls attention to the manner ; it blunts the sensibilities ; it renders excellencies odious.

67. "Beauty deprived of its proper foils and adjuncts ceases to be enjoyed as beauty, just as light deprived of all shadow ceases to be enjoyed as light. A white canvas cannot produce an effect of sunshine ; the painter must darken it in some places before he can make it look luminous in others ; nor can an uninterrupted succession of beauty produce the true effect of beauty ; it must be foiled by inferiority before its own power can be developed. Nature has for the most part mingled her inferior and noble elements as she mingles sunshine with shade, giving due use and influence to both, and the painter who chooses to remove the shadow, perishes in the burning desert he has created. The truly high and beautiful art of Angelico is continually refreshed and strengthened by his frank portraiture of the most ordinary features of his brother monks and of the recorded peculiarities of ungainly sanctity ; but the modern German and Raphaelesque schools lose all honour and nobleness in barber-like admiration of handsome faces, and have, in fact, no real faith except in straight noses, and curled hair. Paul Veronese opposes

the dwarf to the soldier, and the negress to the queen; Shakespeare places Caliban beside Miranda, and Autolycus beside Perdita; but the vulgar idealist withdraws his beauty to the safety of the saloon, and his innocence to the seclusion of the cloister; he pretends that he does this in delicacy of choice and purity of sentiment, while in truth he has neither courage to front the monster, nor wit enough to furnish the knave.”<sup>1</sup>

68. And how is Variety to be secured? The plan is simple, but like many other simple plans, is not without difficulty. It is for the writer to obey the great cardinal principle of Sincerity, and be brave enough to express himself in his own way, following the moods of his own mind, rather than endeavouring to catch the accents of another, or to adapt himself to some standard of taste. No man really thinks and feels monotonously. If he is monotonous in his manner of setting forth his thoughts and feelings, that is either because he has not learned the art of writing, or because he is more or less consciously imitating the manner of others. The subtle play of thought will give movement and life to his style if he do not clog it with critical superstitions. I do not say that it will give him grace and power; I do not say that relying on perfect sincerity will make him a fine writer, because sincerity will not give talent; but I say that sincerity will give him all the power that is possible to him, and will secure him the inestimable excellence of Variety.

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON  
*is born with power; cannot learn*  
STYLE IN LITERATURE: ITS TECHNICAL  
*, as end in itself*  
ELEMENTS<sup>1</sup>

1. There is nothing more disenchanting to man than to be shown the springs and mechanism of any art. All our arts and occupations lie wholly on the surface; it is on the surface that we perceive their beauty, fitness, and significance; and to pry below is to be appalled by their emptiness and shocked by the coarseness of the strings and pulleys. In a similar way, psychology itself, when pushed to any nicety, discovers an abhorrent baldness, but rather from the fault of our analysis than from any poverty native to the mind. And perhaps in æsthetics the reason is the same: those disclosures which seem fatal to the dignity of art, seem so perhaps only in the proportion of our ignorance; and those conscious and unconscious artifices, which it seems unworthy of the serious artist to employ, were yet, if we had the power to trace them to their springs, indications of a delicacy of the sense finer than we conceive, and hints of ancient harmonies in nature. This ignorance at least is largely irremediable. We shall never learn the affinities of beauty; for they lie too deep in nature and too far back in the mysterious history of man. The amateur, in consequence, will always grudgingly receive details of method, which can be stated, but can

<sup>1</sup> From the *Contemporary Review*, April, 1885.

never wholly be explained ; nay, on the principle laid down in Hudibras, that

still the less they understand,  
The more they admire the sleight-of-hand,

many are conscious at each new disclosure of a diminution in the ardour of their pleasure. I must therefore warn that well-known character, the general reader, that I am here embarked upon a most distasteful business : taking down the picture from the wall and looking on the back ; and, like the inquiring child, pulling the musical cart to pieces.

**2. Choice of Words.** — The art of literature stands apart from among its sisters, because the material in which the literary artist works is the dialect of life ; hence, on the one hand, a strange freshness and immediacy of address to the public mind, which is ready prepared to understand it ; but hence, on the other, a singular limitation. The sister arts enjoy the use of a plastic and ductile material, like the modeller's clay ; literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words. You have seen those blocks, dear to the nursery : this one a pillar, that a pediment, a third a window or a vase. It is with blocks of just such arbitrary size and figure that the literary architect is condemned to design the palace of his art. Nor is this all ; for since these blocks, or words, are the acknowledged currency of our daily affairs, there are here possible none of those suppressions by which other arts obtain relief, continuity, and vigour ; no hieroglyphic touch, no smoothed impasto, no inscrutable shadow, as in painting ; no blank wall, as in architecture ; but every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph must move in a logical progression, and convey a definite conventional import.

3. Now, the first merit which attracts in the pages of a good writer, or the talk of a brilliant conversationalist, is the apt choice and contrast of the words employed. It is, indeed, a strange art to take these blocks, rudely conceived for the purpose of the market or the bar, and by tact of application touch them to the finest meanings and distinctions, restore to them their primal energy, wittily shift them to another issue, or make of them a drum to rouse the passions. But though this form of merit is, without doubt, the most sensible and seizing, it is far from being equally present in all writers. The effect of words in Shakespeare, their singular justice, significance, and poetic charm, is different, indeed, from the effect of words in Addison or Fielding. Or, to take an example nearer home, the words in Carlyle seem electrified into an energy of lineament, like the faces of men furiously moved; whilst the words in Macaulay, apt enough to convey his meaning, harmonious enough in sound, yet glide from the memory like undistinguished elements in a general effect. But the first class of writers have no monopoly of literary merit. There is a sense in which Addison is superior to Carlyle; a sense in which Cicero is better than Tacitus, in which Voltaire excels Montaigne; it certainly lies not in the choice of words; it lies not in the interest or value of the matter; it lies not in force of intellect, of poetry, or of humour. The three first are but infants to the three second; and yet each, in a particular point of literary art, excels his superior in the whole. What is that point?

4. **The Web.**—Literature, although it stands apart by reason of the great destiny and general use of its medium in the affairs of men, is yet an art like other arts. Of these we may distinguish two great classes: those arts, like sculpture, painting, acting, which are representative, or,

as used to be said very clumsily, imitative; and those, like architecture, music, and the dance, which are self-sufficient, and merely presentative.<sup>1</sup> Each class, in right of this distinction, obeys principles apart; yet both may claim a common ground of existence, and it may be said with sufficient justice that the motive and end of any art whatever is to make a pattern; a pattern, it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines; but still a pattern. That is the plane on which these sisters meet; it is by this that they are arts; and if it be well they should at times forget their childish origin, addressing their intelligence to virile tasks, and performing unconsciously that necessary function of their life, to make a pattern, it is still imperative that the pattern shall be made.

5. Music and literature, the two temporal arts, contrive their pattern of sounds in time; or, in other words, of sounds and pauses. Communication may be made in broken words, the business of life be carried on with substantives alone; but that is not what we call literature; and the true business of the literary artist is to plait or weave his meaning, involving it around itself; so that each sentence, by successive phrases, shall first come into a kind of knot, and then, after a moment of suspended meaning, solve and clear itself. In every properly constructed sentence there

<sup>1</sup> The division of the arts may best be shown in a tabular form, thus :—

	In time	In space	In time and space
Presentative . . . . .	Music	Painting, Sculpture, etc.	Dance.
Representative . . . . .	Literature	Architecture.*	Acting. —R. L. S.

\* [The relative position of "Architecture" and "Painting, Sculpture, etc." should evidently be changed.]

should be observed this knot or hitch ; so that (however delicately) we are led to foresee, to expect, and then to welcome the successive phrases. The pleasure may be heightened by an element of surprise, as, very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested, and then deftly evaded. Each phrase, besides, is to be comely in itself ; and between the implication and the evolution of the sentence there should be a satisfying equipoise of sound ; for nothing more often disappoints the ear than a sentence solemnly and sonorously prepared, and hastily and weakly finished. Nor should the balance be too striking and exact, for the one rule is to be infinitely various ; to interest, to disappoint, to surprise, and yet still to gratify ; to be ever changing, as it were, the stitch, and yet still to give the effect of an ingenious neatness.

6. The conjurer juggles with two oranges, and our pleasure in beholding him springs from this, that neither is, for an instant, overlooked or sacrificed. So with the writer. His pattern, which is to please the supersensual ear, is yet addressed, throughout and first of all, to the demands of logic. Whatever be the obscurities, whatever the intricacies of the argument, the neatness of the fabric must not suffer, or the artist has been proved unequal to his design. And, on the other hand, no form of words must be selected, no knot must be tied among the phrases, unless knot and word be precisely what is wanted to forward and illuminate the argument ; for to fail in this is to swindle in the game. The genius of prose rejects the cheville no less emphatically than the laws of verse ; and the cheville, I should perhaps explain to some of my readers, is any meaningless or very watered phrase em-

ployed to strike a balance in the sound. Pattern and argument live in each other; and it is by the brevity, clearness, charm, or emphasis of the second, that we judge the strength and fitness of the first.

7. Style is synthetic; and the artist, seeking, so to speak, a peg to plait about, takes up at once two or more elements, or two or more views of the subject in hand; combines, implicates, and contrasts them; and while, in one sense, he was merely seeking an occasion for the necessary knot, he will be found, in the other, to have greatly enriched the meaning, or to have transacted the work of two sentences in the space of one. In the change from the successive shallow statements of the old chronicler to the dense and luminous flow of highly synthetic narrative, there is implied a vast amount of both philosophy and wit. The philosophy we clearly see, recognizing in the synthetic writer a far more deep and stimulating view of life, and a far keener sense of the generation and affinity of events. The wit we might imagine to be lost; but it is not so, for it is just that wit, these perpetual nice contrivances, these difficulties overcome, this double purpose attained, these two oranges kept simultaneously dancing in the air, that, consciously or not, afford the reader his delight. Nay, and this wit, so little recognized, is the necessary organ of that philosophy which we so much admire. That style is therefore the most perfect, not, as fools say, which is the most natural, for the most natural is the disjointed babble of the chronicler; but which attains the highest degree of elegant and pregnant implication unobtrusively; or if obtrusively, then with the greatest gain to sense and vigour. Even the derangement of the phrases from their (so-called) natural order is luminous for the mind; and it is by the means of such

designed reversal that the elements of a judgment may be most pertinently marshalled, or the stages of a complicated action most perspicuously bound into one.

8. The web, then, or the pattern: a web at once sensuous and logical, an elegant and pregnant texture: that is style, that is the foundation of the art of literature. Books indeed continue to be read, for the interest of the fact or fable, in which this quality is poorly represented, but still it will be there. And, on the other hand, how many do we continue to peruse and reperuse with pleasure whose only merit is the elegance of texture? I am tempted to mention Cicero; and since Mr. Anthony Trollope is dead, I will. It is a poor diet for the mind, a very colourless and toothless "criticism of life"; but we enjoy the pleasure of a most intricate and dexterous pattern, every stitch a model at once of elegance and of good sense; and the two oranges, even if one of them be rotten, kept dancing with inimitable grace.

9. Up to this moment I have had my eye mainly upon prose; for though in verse, also, the implication of the logical texture is a crowning beauty, yet in verse it may be dispensed with. You would think that here was a death-blow to all I have been saying; and far from that, it is but a new illustration of the principle involved. For if the versifier is not bound to weave a pattern of his own, it is because another pattern has been formally imposed upon him by the laws of verse. For that is the essence of a prosody. Verse may be rhythmical; it may be merely alliterative; it may, like the French, depend wholly on the (quasi) regular recurrence of the rhyme; or, like the Hebrew, it may consist in the strangely fanciful device of repeating the same idea. It does not matter on what principle the law is based, so it be a law. It may be pure

convention ; it may have no inherent beauty ; all that we have a right to ask of any prosody is, that it shall lay down a pattern for the writer, and that what it lays down shall be neither too easy nor too hard. Hence it comes that it is much easier for men of equal facility to write fairly pleasing verse than reasonably interesting prose ; for in prose the pattern itself has to be invented, and the difficulties first created before they can be solved. Hence, again, there follows the peculiar greatness of the true versifier : such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Victor Hugo, whom I place beside them as versifier merely, not as poet. These not only knit and knot the logical texture of the style with all the dexterity and strength of prose ; they not only fill up the pattern of the verse with infinite variety and sober wit ; but they give us, besides, a rare and special pleasure, by the art, comparable to that of counterpoint, with which they follow at the same time, and now contrast, and now combine, the double pattern of the texture and the verse. Here the sounding line concludes ; a little further on, the well-knit sentence ; and yet a little further, and both will reach their solution on the same ringing syllable. The best that can be offered by the best writer of prose is to show us the development of the idea and the stylistic pattern proceeding hand in hand, sometimes by an obvious and triumphant effort, sometimes with a great air of ease and nature. The writer of verse, by virtue of conquering another difficulty, delights us with a new series of triumphs. He follows three purposes where his rival followed only two ; and the change is of precisely the same nature as that from melody to harmony. Or if you prefer to return to the juggler, behold him now, to the vastly increased enthusiasm of the spectators, juggling with three oranges instead of two. Thus it is : added difficulty, added

beauty, . and the pattern, with every fresh element, becoming more interesting in itself.

10. Yet it must not be thought that verse is simply an addition ; something is lost as well as something gained ; and there remains plainly traceable, in comparing the best prose with the best verse, a certain broad distinction of method in the web. Tight as a versifier may draw the knot of logic, yet for the ear he still leaves the tissue of the sentence floating somewhat loose. In prose, the sentence turns upon a pivot, nicely balanced, and fits into itself with an obtrusive neatness like a puzzle. The ear remarks and is singly gratified by this return and balance ; while in verse it is all diverted to the measure. To find comparable passages is hard ; for either the versifier is hugely the superior of the rival, or, if he be not, and still persist in his more delicate enterprise, he fails to be as widely his inferior. But let us select them from the pages of the same writer, one who was ambidexter ; let us take, for instance, Rumour's Prologue to the Second Part of Henry IV, a fine flourish of eloquence in Shakespeare's second manner, and set it side by side with Falstaff's praise of sherris, act iv, scene 3 ; or let us compare the beautiful prose spoken throughout by Rosalind and Orlando, compare, for example, the first speech of all, Orlando's speech to Adam, with what passage it shall please you to select — the Seven Ages from the same play, or even such a stave of nobility as Othello's farewell to war ; and still you will be able to perceive, if you have an ear for that class of music, a certain superior degree of organization in the prose ; a compacter fitting of the parts ; a balance in the swing and the return as of a throbbing pendulum. We must not, in things temporal, take from those who have little the little that they have ; the merits of prose are

inferior, but they are not the same ; it is a little kingdom, but an independent.

11. **Rhythm of the Phrase.** — Some way back, I used a word which still awaits an application. Each phrase, I said, was to be comely ; but what is a comely phrase ? In all ideal and material points, literature, being a representative art, must look for analogies to painting and the like ; but in what is technical and executive, being a temporal art, it must seek for them in music. Each phrase of each sentence, like an air or a recitative in music, should be so artfully compounded out of long and short, out of accented and unaccented, as to gratify the sensual ear. And of this the ear is the sole judge. It is impossible to lay down laws. Even in our accentual and rhythmic language no analysis can find the secret of the beauty of a verse ; how much less, then, of those phrases, such as prose is built of, which obey no law but to be lawless and yet to please ? The little that we know of verse (and for my part I owe it all to my friend Professor Fleeming Jenkin) is, however, particularly interesting in the present connection. We have been accustomed to describe the heroic line as five iambic feet, and to be filled with pain and confusion whenever, as by the conscientious schoolboy, we have heard our own description put in practice.

All n̄ight | the dreàd | less àn | gel ùn | pursùed<sup>1</sup>

goes the schoolboy ; but though we close our ears, we cling to our definition, in spite of its proved and naked insufficiency. Mr. Jenkin was not so easily pleased, and readily discovered that the heroic line consists of four groups, or, if you prefer the phrase, contains four pauses :

All night | the dreadless | angel | unpursued.

<sup>1</sup> Milton. — R. L. S.

Four groups, each practically uttered as one word: the first, in this case, an iamb; the second, an amphibrachys; the third, a trochee; and the fourth, an amphimacer; and yet our schoolboy, with no other liberty but that of inflicting pain, had triumphantly scanned it as five iambs. Perceive, now, this fresh richness of intricacy in the web; this fourth orange, hitherto unremarked, but still kept flying with the others. What had seemed to be one thing it now appears is two; and, like some puzzle in arithmetic, the verse is made at the same time to read in fives and to read in fours.

12. But, again, four is not necessary. We do not, indeed, find verses in six groups, because there is not room for six in the ten syllables; and we do not find verses of two, because one of the main distinctions of verse from prose resides in the comparative shortness of the group; but it is even common to find verses of three. Five is the one forbidden number; because five is the number of the feet; and if five were chosen, the two patterns would coincide, and that opposition which is the life of verse would instantly be lost. We have here a clew to the effect of polysyllables, above all in Latin, where they are so common and make so brave an architecture in the verse; for the polysyllable is a group of nature's making. If but some Roman would return from Hades (Martial, for choice), and tell me by what conduct of the voice these thundering verses should be uttered—"Aut Lacedæmonium Tarentum," for a case in point—I feel as if I should enter at last into the full enjoyment of the best of human verses.

13. But, again, the five feet are all iambic, or supposed to be; by the mere count of syllables the four groups cannot be all iambic; as a question of elegance, I doubt if any one of them requires to be so; and I am certain that for

choice no two of them should scan the same. The singular beauty of the verse analyzed above is due, so far as analysis can carry us, part, indeed, to the clever repetition of *l*, *d*, and *n*, but part to this variety of scansion in the groups. The groups which, like the bar in music, break up the verse for utterance, fall uniambically; and in declaiming a so-called iambic verse, it may so happen that we never utter one iambic foot. And yet to this neglect of the original beat there is a limit.

Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts,<sup>1</sup>

is, with all its eccentricities, a good heroic line; for though it scarcely can be said to indicate the beat of the iamb, it certainly suggests no other measure to the ear. But begin

Mother of Athens, eye of Greece,

or merely "Mother Athens," and the game is up, for the trochaic beat has been suggested. The eccentric scansion of the groups is an adornment; but as soon as the original beat has been forgotten, they cease implicitly to be eccentric. Variety is what is sought; but if we destroy the original mould, one of the terms of this variety is lost, and we fall back on sameness. Thus, both as to the arithmetical measure of the verse, and the degree of regularity in scansion, we see the laws of prosody to have one common purpose: to keep alive the opposition of two schemes simultaneously followed; to keep them notably apart, though still coincident; and to balance them with such judicial nicety before the reader, that neither shall be unperceived and neither signally prevail.

**14.** The rule of rhythm in prose is not so intricate. Here, too, we write in groups, or phrases, as I prefer to

<sup>1</sup> Milton.—R. L. S.

call them, for the prose phrase is greatly longer and is much more nonchalantly uttered than the group in verse ; so that not only is there a greater interval of continuous sound between the pauses, but, for that very reason, word is linked more readily to word by a more summary enunciation. Still, the phrase is the strict analogue of the group, and successive phrases, like successive groups, must differ openly in length and rhythm. The rule of scansion in verse is to suggest no measure but the one in hand ; in prose, to suggest no measure at all. Prose must be rhythmical, and it may be as much so as you will ; but it must not be metrical. It may be anything, but it must not be verse. A single heroic line may very well pass and not disturb the somewhat larger stride of the prose style ; but one following another will produce an instant impression of poverty, flatness, and disenchantment. The same lines delivered with the measured utterance of verse would perhaps seem rich in variety. By the more summary enunciation proper to prose, as to a more distant vision, these niceties of difference are lost. A whole verse is uttered as one phrase ; and the ear is soon wearied by a succession of groups identical in length. The prose writer, in fact, since he is allowed to be so much less harmonious, is condemned to a perpetually fresh ~~variety of movement~~ on a larger scale, and must never disappoint the ear by the trot of an accepted metre. And this obligation is the third orange with which he has to juggle, the third quality which the prose writer must work into his pattern of words. It may be thought, perhaps, that this is a quality of ease rather than a fresh difficulty ; but such is the inherently rhythmical strain of the English language, that the bad writer — and must I take for example that admired friend of my boyhood, Captain Reid ? — the inexperienced writer,

as Dickens in his earlier attempts to be impressive, and the jaded writer, as any one may see for himself, all tend to fall at once into the production of bad blank verse. And here it may be pertinently asked, Why bad? And I suppose it might be enough to answer that no man ever made good verse by accident, and that no verse can ever sound otherwise than trivial, when uttered with the delivery of prose. But we can go beyond such answers. The weak side of verse is the regularity of the beat, which in itself is decidedly less impressive than the movement of the noble prose ; and it is just into this weak side, and this alone, that our careless writer falls. A peculiar density and mass, consequent on the nearness of the pauses, is one of the chief good qualities of verse ; but this our accidental versifier, still following after the swift gait and large gestures of prose, does not so much as aspire to imitate. Lastly, since he remains unconscious that he is making verse at all, it can never occur to him to extract those effects of counterpoint and opposition which I have referred to as the final grace and justification of verse, and, I may add, of blank verse in particular.

**15.—Contents of the Phrase.**—Here is a great deal of talk about rhythm—and naturally; for in our canorous language rhythm is always at the door. But it must not be forgotten that in some languages this element is almost, if not quite, extinct, and that in our own it is probably decaying. The even speech of many educated Americans sounds the note of danger. I should see it go with something as bitter as despair, but I should not be desperate. As in verse, no element, not even rhythm, is necessary; so, in prose also, other sorts of beauty will arise and take the place and play the part of those that we outlive. The beauty of the expected beat in verse, the beauty in prose

of its larger and more lawless melody, patent as they are to English hearing, are already silent in the ears of our next neighbours ; for in France the oratorial accent and the pattern of the web have almost, or altogether, succeeded to their places ; and the French prose writer would be astounded at the labours of his brother across the Channel, and how a good quarter of his toil, above all *invita Minerva*,<sup>1</sup> is to avoid writing verse. So wonderfully far apart have races wandered in spirit, and so hard it is to understand the literature next door !

16. Yet French prose is distinctly better than English ; and French verse, above all while Hugo lives, it will not do to place upon one side. What is more to our purpose, a phrase or a verse in French is easily distinguishable as comely or uncomely. There is, then, another element of comeliness hitherto overlooked in this analysis : ~~the contents of the phrase~~. Each phrase in literature is built of sounds, as each phrase in music consists of notes. One sound suggests, echoes, demands, and harmonizes with another ; and the art of rightly using these concordances is the final art in literature. It used to be a piece of good advice to all young writers to avoid alliteration ; and the advice was sound, in so far as it prevented daubing. None the less for that, was it abominable nonsense, and the mere raving of those blindest of the blind who will not see. The beauty of the contents of a phrase, or of a sentence, depends implicitly upon alliteration and upon assonance. The vowel demands to be repeated ; the consonant demands to be repeated ; and both cry aloud to be perpetually varied. You may follow the adventures of a letter through any passage that has particularly pleased you.

<sup>1</sup> [Against his natural bent.]

find it, perhaps, denied awhile, to tantalize the ear; find it fired again at you in a whole broadside; or find it pass into congenerous sounds, one liquid or labial melting away into another. And you will find another and much stranger circumstance. Literature is written by and for two senses: a sort of internal ear, quick to perceive "unheard melodies"; and the eye, which directs the pen and deciphers the printed phrase. Well, even as there are rhymes for the eye, so you will find that there are assonances and alliterations; that where an author is running the open  $\alpha$ , deceived by the eye and our strange English spelling, he will often show a tenderness for the flat  $\alpha$ ; and that where he is running a particular consonant, he will not improbably rejoice to write it down even when it is mute or bears a different value.

17. Here, then, we have a fresh pattern — a pattern, to speak grossly, of letters — which makes the fourth preoccupation of the prose writer, and the fifth of the versifier. At times it is very delicate and hard to perceive, and then perhaps most excellent and winning (I say perhaps); but at times again the elements of this literal melody stand more boldly forward and usurp the ear. It becomes, therefore, somewhat a matter of conscience to select examples; and as I cannot very well ask the reader to help me, I shall do the next best by giving him the reason or the history of each selection. The two first, one in prose, one in verse, I chose without previous analysis, simply as engaging passages that had long re-echoed in my ear.

18. "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and

heat."<sup>1</sup> Down to "virtue," the current *s* and *r* are both announced and repeated unobtrusively, and by way of a grace-note that almost inseparable group *pvf* is given entire.<sup>2</sup> The next phrase is a period of repose, almost ugly in itself, both *s* and *r* still audible, and *b* given as the last fulfilment of *pvf*. In the next four phrases, from "that never" down to "run for," the mask is thrown off, and but for a slight repetition of the *f* and *v*, the whole matter turns, almost too obtrusively, on *s* and *r*; first *s* coming to the front, and then *r*. In the concluding phrase all these favourite letters, and even the flat *a*, a timid preference for which is just perceptible, are discarded at a blow and in a bundle; and to make the break more obvious, every word ends with a dental, and all but one with *t*, for which we have been cautiously prepared since the beginning. The singular dignity of the first clause, and this hammer-stroke of the last, go far to make the charm of this exquisite sentence. But it is fair to own that *s* and *r* are used a little coarsely.

19.	In Xanadu did Kubla Khan	( <i>kändl</i> )
	A stately pleasure dome decree,	( <i>kdlsr</i> )
	Where Alph the sacred river ran,	( <i>kändlsr</i> )
	Through caverns measureless to man,	( <i>känlsr</i> )
	Down to a sunless sea. <sup>3</sup>	( <i>ndls</i> )

Here I have put the analysis of the main group alongside the lines; and the more it is looked at, the more interesting it will seem. But there are further niceties. In

<sup>1</sup> Milton.—R. L. S.

<sup>2</sup> As *pvf* will continue to haunt us through our English examples, take, by way of comparison, this Latin verse, of which it forms a chief adornment, and do not hold me answerable for the all too Roman freedom of the sense: "Hanc volo, quæ facilis, quæ palliolata vagatur."—R. L. S.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge.—R. L. S.

lines two and four, the current *s* is most delicately varied with *z*. In line three, the current flat *a* is twice varied with the open *a*, already suggested in line two, and both times ("where" and "sacred") in conjunction with the current *r*. In the same line *f* and *v* (a harmony in themselves, even when shorn of their comrade *p*) are admirably contrasted. And in line four there is a marked subsidiary *m*, which again was announced in line two. I stop from weariness, for more might yet be said.

**20.** My next example was recently quoted from Shakespeare as an example of the poet's colour sense. Now, I do not think literature has anything to do with colour, or poets anyway the better of such a sense; and I instantly attacked this passage, since "purple" was the word that had so pleased the writer of the article, to see if there might not be some literary reason for its use. It will be seen that I succeeded amply; and I am bound to say I think the passage<sup>1</sup> exceptional in Shakespeare — exceptional, indeed, in literature; but it was not I who chose it.

The *barge* she sat in, like a *burnished throne*  
*Burnt* on the water: the *poop* was *beaten gold*,  
*Purple* the sails and so *Pur*<sup>2</sup>*fumèd* that  
 The winds were lovesick with them.

It may be asked why I have put the *P* of *perfumèd* in capitals; and I reply, because this change from *p* to *f* is the completion of that from *b* to *p*, already so adroitly carried out. Indeed, the whole passage is a monument of curious ingenuity; and it seems scarce worth while to indicate the subsidiary *s*, *l*, and *w*. In the same article, a second passage from Shakespeare was quoted once again, as an example of his colour sense:

<sup>1</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra*.—R. L. S.

<sup>2</sup> Per.—R. L. S.

A mole cinque-spotted like the crimson drops  
I' the bottom of a cowslip.<sup>1</sup>

It is very curious, very artificial, and not worth while to analyze at length: I leave it to the reader. But before I turn my back on Shakespeare, I should like to quote a passage, for my own pleasure, and for a very model of every technical art:

But in the wind and tempest of her frown,	<i>w. p. v. f. (st) (ow)</i> <sup>2</sup>
Distinction with a loud and powerful fan,	<i>w. p. f. (st) (ow) L.</i>
Puffing at all, winnowes the light away;	<i>w. p. f. l.</i>
And what hath mass and matter by itself	<i>w. f. l. m. ð.</i>
Lies rich in virtue and unmingle <sup>d</sup> . <sup>3</sup>	<i>v. l. m.</i>

**21.** From these delicate and choice writers I turned with some curiosity to a player of the big drum—Macaulay. I had in hand the two-volume edition, and I opened at the beginning of the second volume. Here was what I read: “The violence of revolutions is generally proportioned to the degree of the maladministration which has produced them. It is therefore not strange that the government of Scotland, having been during many years greatly more corrupt than the government of England, should have fallen with a far heavier ruin. The movement against the last king of the house of Stuart was in England conservative, in Scotland destructive. The English complained not of the law, but of the violation of the law.” This was plain-sailing enough; it was our old friend *pvf*, floated by the liquids in a body; but as I read on, and turned the page, and still found *pvf* with his attendant liquids, I confess my mind misgave me utterly. This could be no trick of Macaulay’s; it must be the nature of

<sup>1</sup> *Cymbeline*.—R. L. S.

<sup>2</sup> The *v* is in “of.”—R. L. S.

<sup>3</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*.—R. L. S.

the English tongue. In a kind of despair, I turned half-way through the volume; and coming upon his lordship dealing with General Cannon, and fresh from Claverhouse and Killiekrankie, here, with elucidative spelling, was my reward:

"Meanwhile the disorders of *kannonskamp* went on inkreasing. He kalled a *kouncil* of war to *konsider* what *kourse* it would be advisable to take. But as soon as the *kouncil* had met, a preliminary *kuestion* was raised. The army was almost eksklusively a Highland army. The recent viktory had been won eksklusively by Highland warriors. Great chiefs who had brought six or seven hundred fighting men into the field did not think it fair that they should be outvoted by gentlemen from Ireland and from the Low Kountries, who bore, indeed, King James's kommission, and were kalled kolonels and kaptains, but who were kolonels without regiments and kaptains without kompanies."

A moment of *fv* in all this world of *k's*! It was not the English language, then, that was an instrument of one string, but Macaulay that was an incomparable dauber.

**22.** It was probably from this barbaric love of repeating the same sound, rather than from any design of clearness, that he acquired his irritating habit of repeating words; I say the one rather than the other, because such a trick of the ear is deeper-seated and more original in man than any logical consideration. Few writers, indeed, are probably conscious of the length to which they push this melody of letters. One, writing very diligently, and only concerned about the meaning of his words and the rhythm of his phrases, was struck into amazement by the eager triumph with which he cancelled one expression to substitute another. Neither changed the sense; both being monosyllables, neither could affect the scansion; and it was only by looking back on what he had already written that the mystery was solved; the second word contained an

open  $\alpha$ , and for nearly half a page he had been riding that vowel to the death.

23. In practice, I should add, the ear is not always so exacting ; and ordinary writers, in ordinary moments, content themselves with avoiding what is harsh, and here and there, upon a rare occasion, buttressing a phrase, or linking two together with a patch of assonance, or a momentary jingle of alliteration. To understand how constant is this preoccupation of good writers, even where its results are least obtrusive, it is only necessary to turn to the bad. There, indeed, you will find cacophony supreme, the rattle of incongruous consonants only relieved by the jaw-breaking hiatus, and whole phrases not to be articulated by the powers of man.

24. Conclusion.—We may now briefly enumerate the elements of style. We have, peculiar to the prose writer, the task of keeping his phrases large, rhythmical, and pleasing to the ear, without ever allowing them to fall into the strictly metrical ; peculiar to the versifier, the task of combining and contrasting his double, treble, and quadruple pattern, feet and groups, logic and metre—harmonious in diversity : common to both, the task of artfully combining the prime elements of language into phrases that shall be musical in the mouth ; the task of weaving their argument into a texture of committed phrases and of rounded periods — but this particularly binding in the case of prosé : and again common to both, the task of choosing apt, explicit, and communicative words. We begin to see now what an intricate affair is any perfect passage ; how many faculties, whether of taste or pure reason, must be held upon the stretch to make it ; and why, when it is made, it should afford us so complete a pleasure. From the arrangement of according letters, which is altogether

arabesque and sensual, up to the architecture of the elegant and the pregnant sentence, which is a vigorous act of the pure intellect, there is scarce a faculty in man but has been exercised. We need not wonder, then, if perfect sentences are rare and perfect pages rarer.

## WALTER PATER

### STYLE<sup>1</sup>

1. Since all progress of mind consists for the most part in differentiation, in the resolution of an obscure and complex object into its component aspects, it is surely the stupidest of losses to confuse things which right reason has put asunder, to lose the sense of achieved distinctions, the distinction between poetry and prose, for instance, or, to speak more exactly, between the laws and characteristic excellences of verse and prose composition. On the other hand, those who have dwelt most emphatically on the distinction between prose and verse, prose and poetry, may sometimes have been tempted to limit the proper functions of prose too narrowly ; and this again is at least false economy, as being, in effect, the renunciation of a certain means or faculty, in a world where after all we must needs make the most of things. Critical efforts to limit art *a priori*, by anticipations regarding the natural incapacity of the material with which this or that artist works, as the sculptor with solid form, or the prose-writer with the ordinary language of men, are always liable to be discredited by the facts of artistic production ; and while prose is actually found to be a coloured thing with Bacon, picturesque with Livy and Carlyle, musical with Cicero and Newman, mystical and intimate with Plato and Michelet and Sir Thomas Browne, exalted or florid, it may be, with Milton and Taylor, it will be useless

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1888. From *Appreciations*, 1889.

to protest that it can be nothing at all, except something very tamely and narrowly confined to mainly practical ends — a kind of “good round-hand”; as useless as the protest that poetry might not touch prosaic subjects as with Wordsworth, or an abstruse matter as with Browning, or treat contemporary life nobly as with Tennyson. In subordination to one essential beauty in all good literary style, in all literature as a fine art, as there are many beauties of poetry so the beauties of prose are many, and it is the business of criticism to estimate them as such; as it is good in the criticism of verse to look for those hard, logical, and quasi-prosaic excellences which that too has, or needs. To find in the poem, amid the flowers, the allusions, the mixed perspectives, of *Lycidas* for instance, the thought, the logical structure:— how wholesome! how delightful! as to identify in prose what we call the poetry, the imaginative power, not treating it as out of place and a kind of vagrant intruder, but by way of an estimate of its rights, that is, of its achieved powers, there.

**2.** Dryden, with the characteristic instinct of his age, loved to emphasize the distinction between poetry and prose, the protest against their confusion with each other coming with somewhat diminished effect from one whose poetry was so prosaic. In truth, his sense of prosaic excellence affected his verse rather than his prose, which is not only fervid, richly figured, poetic, as we say, but vitiated, all unconsciously, by many a scanning line. Setting up correctness, that humble merit of prose, as the central literary excellence, he is really a less correct writer than he may seem, still with an imperfect mastery of the relative pronoun. It might have been foreseen that, in the rotations of mind, the province of poetry in prose would find its assertor; and, a century after Dryden, amid very differ-

ent intellectual needs, and with the need therefore of great modifications in literary form, the range of the poetic force in literature was effectively enlarged by Wordsworth. The true distinction between prose and poetry he regarded as the almost technical or accidental one of the absence or presence of metrical beauty, or, say ! metrical restraint ; and for him the opposition came to be between verse and prose of course ; but, as the essential dichotomy in this matter, between imaginative and unimaginative writing, parallel to De Quincey's distinction between "the literature of power and the literature of knowledge," in the former of which the composer gives us not fact, but his peculiar sense of fact, whether past or present.

3. Dismissing then, under sanction of Wordsworth, that harsher opposition of poetry to prose, as savouring in fact of the arbitrary psychology of the last century, and with it the prejudice that there can be but one only beauty of prose style, I propose here to point out certain qualities of all literature as a fine art, which, if they apply to the literature of fact, apply still more to the literature of the imaginative sense of fact, while they apply indifferently to verse and prose, so far as either is really imaginative — certain conditions of true art in both alike, which conditions may also contain in them the secret of the proper discrimination and guardianship of the peculiar excellences of either.

4. The line between fact and something quite different from external fact is, indeed, hard to draw. In Pascal, for instance, in the persuasive writers generally, how difficult to define the point where, from time to time, argument which, if it is to be worth anything at all, must consist of facts or groups of facts, becomes a pleading — a theorem no longer, but essentially an appeal to the reader to catch the writer's spirit, to think with him, if one can or will —

an expression no longer of fact but of his sense of it, his peculiar intuition of a world, prospective, or discerned below the faulty conditions of the present, in either case changed somewhat from the actual world. In science, on the other hand, in history so far as it conforms to scientific rule, we have a literary domain where the imagination may be thought to be always an intruder. And as, in all science, the functions of literature reduce themselves eventually to the transcribing of fact, so all the excellences of literary form in regard to science are reducible to various kinds of painstaking ; this good quality being involved in all "skilled work" whatever, in the drafting of an act of parliament, as in sewing. Yet here again, the writer's sense of fact, in history especially, and in all those complex subjects which do but lie on the borders of science, will still take the place of fact, in various degrees. Your historian, for instance, with absolutely truthful intention, amid the multitude of facts presented to him must needs select, and in selecting assert something of his own humour, something that comes not of the world without but of a vision within. So Gibbon moulds his unwieldy material to a preconceived view. Livy, Tacitus, Michelet, moving full of poignant sensibility amid the records of the past, each, after his own sense, modifies — who can tell where and to what degree? — and becomes something else than a transcriber ; each, as he thus modifies, passing into the domain of art proper. For just in proportion as the writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work fine art; and good art (as I hope ultimately to show) in proportion to the truth of his presentation of that sense ; as in those humbler or plainer functions of literature also, truth — truth to bare fact, there one is conserved merely with,

— is the essence of such artistic quality as they may have. Truth! there can be no merit, no craft at all, without that. And further, all beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within.

5. The transcript of his sense of fact rather than the fact, as being preferable, pleasanter, more beautiful to the writer himself. In literature, as in every other product of human skill, in the moulding of a bell or a platter for instance, wherever this sense asserts itself, wherever the producer so modifies his work as, over and above its primary use or intention, to make it pleasing (to himself, of course, in the first instance) there, “fine” as opposed to merely serviceable art, exists. Literary art, that is, like all art which is in any way imitative or reproductive of fact—form, or colour, or incident—is the representation of such fact as connected with soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, its volition and power.

6. Such is the matter of imaginative or artistic literature —this transcript, not of mere fact, but of fact in its infinite variety, as modified by human preference in all its infinitely varied forms. It will be good literary art not because it is brilliant, or sober, or rich, or impulsive, or severe, but just in proportion as its representation of that sense, that soul-fact, is true, verse being only one department of such literature, and imaginative prose, it may be thought, being the special art of the modern world. That imaginative prose should be the special and opportune art of the modern world results from two important facts about the latter: first, the chaotic variety and complexity of its interests, making the intellectual issue, the really master currents of the present time incalculable—a condition of mind little susceptible of the restraint proper to

verse form, so that the most characteristic verse of the nineteenth century has been lawless verse; and secondly, an all-pervading naturalism, a curiosity about everything whatever as it really is, involving a certain humility of attitude, cognate to what must, after all, be the less ambitious form of literature. And prose thus asserting itself as the special and privileged artistic faculty of the present day, will be, however critics may try to narrow its scope, as varied in its excellence as humanity itself reflecting on the facts of its latest experience—an instrument of many stops, meditative, observant, descriptive, eloquent, analytic, plaintive, fervid. Its beauties will be not exclusively “pedestrian”: it will exert, in due measure, all the varied charms of poetry, down to the rhythm which, as in Cicero, or Michelet, or Newman, at their best, gives its musical value to every syllable.<sup>1</sup>

7. The literary artist is of necessity a scholar, and in what he proposes to do will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience—the male conscience in this matter, as we must think it, under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men. In this self-criticism, he supposes always that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately, though without consideration for him, over the ground which the female conscience traverses so lightly, so amiably. For the material in which he works

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Saintsbury, in his *Specimens of English Prose, from Malory to Macaulay*, has succeeded in tracing, through successive English prose-writers, the tradition of that severer beauty in them, of which this admirable scholar of our literature is known to be a lover. *English Prose, from Mandeville to Thackeray*, more recently “chosen and edited” by a younger scholar, Mr. Arthur Galton, of New College, Oxford, a lover of our literature at once enthusiastic and discreet, aims at a more various illustration of the eloquent powers of English prose, and is a delightful companion.—PATER.

is no more a creation of his own than the sculptor's marble. Product of a myriad various minds and contending tongues, compact of obscure and minute association, a language has its own abundant and often recondite laws, in the habitual and summary recognition of which scholarship consists. A writer, full of a matter he is before all things anxious to express, may think of those laws, the limitations of vocabulary, structure, and the like, as a restriction, but if a real artist, will find in them an opportunity. His punctilious observance of the proprieties of his medium will diffuse through all he writes a general air of sensibility, of refined usage. *Exclusiones debitæ naturæ* — the exclusions, or rejections which nature demands — we know how large a part these play, according to Bacon, in the science of nature. In a somewhat changed sense, we might say that the art of the scholar is summed up in the observance of those rejections demanded by the nature of his medium, the material he must use. Alive to the value of an atmosphere in which every term finds its utmost degree of expression, and with all the jealousy of a lover of words, he will resist a constant tendency on the part of the majority of those who use them to efface the distinctions of language, the facility of writers often reinforcing in this respect the work of the vulgar. He will feel the obligation not of the laws only, but of those affinities, avoidances, those mere preferences, of his language, which through the associations of literary history have become a part of its nature, prescribing the rejection of many a neology, many a license, many a gipsy phrase which might present itself as actually expressive. His appeal, again, is to the scholar, who has great experience in literature and will show no favour to short cuts, or hackneyed illustration, or an affectation of learning designed for the unlearned. Hence a con-

tention, a sense of self-restraint and renunciation, having for the susceptible reader the effect of a challenge for minute consideration; the attention of the writer, in every minutest detail, being a pledge that it is worth the reader's while to be attentive too, that the writer is dealing scrupulously with his instrument, and therefore, indirectly, with the reader himself also, that he has the science of the instrument he plays on, perhaps, after all, with a freedom which in such case will be the freedom of a master.

8. For meanwhile, braced only by those restraints, he is really vindicating his liberty in the making of a vocabulary, an entire system of composition, for himself, his own true manner; and when we speak of the manner of a true master we mean what is essential in his art. Pedantry being only the scholarship of *le cuistre*<sup>1</sup> (we have no English equivalent) he is no pedant, and does but show his intelligence of the rules of language in his freedoms with it, addition or expansion, which like the spontaneities of manner in a well-bred person will still further illustrate good taste.—The right vocabulary! Translators have not invariably seen how all-important that is in the work of translation, driving for the most part at idiom or construction; whereas, if the original be first-rate, one's first care should be with its elementary particles, Plato, for instance, being often reproducible by an exact following, with no variation in structure, of word after word, as the pencil follows a drawing under tracing paper, so only each word or syllable be not of false colour, to change my illustration a little.

9. Well! That is because any writer worth translating at all has winnowed and searched through his vocabulary, is conscious of the words he would select in systematic

<sup>1</sup> [The school or college fag.]

reading of a dictionary, and still more of the words he would reject were the dictionary other than Johnson's; and doing this with his peculiar sense of the world ever in view, in search of an instrument for the adequate expression of that, he begets a vocabulary faithful to the colouring of his own spirit, and in the strictest sense original. That living authority which language needs lies, in truth, in its scholars, who recognizing always that every language possesses a genius, a very fastidious genius, of its own, expand at once and purify its very elements, which must needs change along with the changing thoughts of living people. Ninety years ago, for instance, great mental force, certainly, was needed by Wordsworth, to break through the consecrated poetic associations of a century, and speak the language that was his, that was to become in a measure the language of the next generation. But he did it with the tact of a scholar also. English, for a quarter of a century past, has been assimilating the phraseology of pictorial art; for half a century, the phraseology of the great German metaphysical movement of eighty years ago; in part also the language of mystical theology: and none but pedants will regret a great consequent increase of its resources. For many years to come its enterprise may well lie in the naturalization of the vocabulary of science, so only it be under the eye of a sensitive scholarship—in a liberal naturalization of the ideas of science too, for after all the chief stimulus of good style is to possess a full, rich, complex matter to grapple with. The literary artist, therefore, will be well aware of physical science; science also attaining, in its turn, its true literary ideal. And then, as the scholar is nothing without the historic sense, he will be apt to restore not really obsolete or really worn-out words, but the finer edge of words still in

use: *ascertain, communicate, discover*,—words like these it has been part of our “business” to misuse. And still, as language was made for man, he will be no authority for correctnesses which, limiting freedom of utterance, were yet but accidents in their origin; as if one vowed not to say “*its*,” which ought to have been in Shakspere; “*his*” and “*hers*,” for inanimate objects, being but a barbarous and really inexpressive survival. Yet we have known many things like this. Racy Saxon monosyllables, close to us as touch and sight, he will intermix readily with those long, savoursome, Latin words, rich in “second intention.” In this late day certainly, no critical process can be conducted reasonably without electicism. Of such electicism we have a justifying example in one of the first poets of our time. How illustrative of monosyllabic effect, of sonorous Latin, of the phraseology of science, of metaphysic, of colloquialism even, are the writings of Tennyson; yet with what a fine, fastidious scholarship throughout!

**10.** A scholar writing for the scholarly, he will of course leave something to the willing intelligence of his reader. “To go preach to the first passer-by,” says Montaigne, “to become tutor to the ignorance of the first I meet, is a thing I abhor;” a thing, in fact, naturally distressing to the scholar, who will therefore ever be shy of offering uncomplimentary assistance to the reader’s wit. To really strenuous minds there is a pleasurable stimulus in the challenge for a continuous effort on their part, to be rewarded by securer and more intimate grasp of the author’s sense. Self-restraint, a skilful economy of means, *ascēsis*, that, too, has a beauty of its own; and for the reader supposed there will be an æsthetic satisfaction in that frugal closeness of style which makes the most of a word, in the exaction from every sentence of a precise relief, in the just spacing out

of word to thought, in the logically filled space connected always with the delightful sense of difficulty overcome.

11. Different classes of persons, at different times, make, of course, very various demands upon literature. Still, scholars, I suppose, and not only scholars but all disinterested lovers of books, will always look to it, as to all other fine art, for a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world. A perfect poem like *Lycidas*, a perfect fiction like *Esmond*, the perfect handling of a theory like Newman's *Idea of a University*, has for them something of the uses of a religious "retreat." Here, then, with a view to the central need of a select few, those "men of a finer thread" who have formed and maintain the literary ideal, everything, every component element, will have undergone exact trial, and, above all, there will be no uncharacteristic or tarnished or vulgar decoration, permissible ornament being for the most part structural, or necessary. As the painter in his picture, so the artist in his book, aims at the production by honourable artifice of a peculiar atmosphere. "The artist," says Schiller, "may be known rather by what he *omits* ;" and in literature, too, the true artist may be best recognized by his tact of omission. For to the grave reader words too are grave; and the ornamental word, the figure, the accessory form or colour or reference, is rarely content to die to thought precisely at the right moment, but will inevitably linger awhile, stirring a long "brain-wave" behind it of perhaps quite alien associations.

12. Just there, it may be, is the detrimental tendency of the sort of scholarly attentiveness of mind I am recommending. But the true artist allows for it. He will remember that, as the very word ornament indicates what is in itself non-essential, so the "one beauty"

of all literary style is of its very essence, and independent, in prose and verse alike, of all removable decoration ; that it may exist in its fullest lustre, as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* for instance, or in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, in a composition utterly unadorned, with hardly a single suggestion of visibly beautiful things. Parallel, allusion, the allusive way generally, the flowers in the garden :— he knows the narcotic force of these upon the negligent intelligence to which any *diversion*, literally, is welcome, any vagrant intruder, because one can go wandering away with it from the immediate subject. Jealous, if he have a really quickening motive within, of all that does not hold directly to that, of the facile, the otiose, he will never depart from the strictly pedestrian process, unless he gains a ponderable something thereby. Even assured of its congruity, he will still question its serviceableness. Is it worth while, can we afford, to attend to just that, to just that figure or literary reference, just then? — Surplusage ! he will dread that as the runner on his muscles. For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the last finish of the gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy, in the rough-hewn block of stone.

13. And what applies to figure or flower must be understood of all other accidental or removable ornaments of writing whatever; and not of specific ornament only, but of all that latent colour and imagery which language as such carries in it. A lover of words for their own sake, to whom nothing about them is unimportant, a minute and constant observer of their physiognomy, he will be on the alert not only for obviously mixed metaphors of course, but for the metaphor that is mixed in all our speech, though a rapid

use may involve no cognition of it. Currently recognizing the incident, the colour, the physical elements or particles in words like *absorb*, *consider*, *extract*, to take the first that occur, he will avail himself of them, as further adding to the resources of expression. The elementary particles of language will be realized as colour and light and shade through his scholarly living in the full sense of them. Still opposing the constant degradation of language by those who use it carelessly, he will not treat coloured glass as if it were clear; and while half the world is using figure unconsciously, will be fully aware not only of all that latent figurative texture in speech, but of the vague, lazy, half-formed personification—a rhetoric, depressing, and worse than nothing, because it has no really rhetorical motive—which plays so large a part there, and, as in the case of more ostentatious ornament, scrupulously exact of it, from syllable to syllable, its precise value.

14. So far I have been speaking of certain conditions of the literary art arising out of the medium or material in or upon which it works, the essential qualities of language and its aptitudes for contingent ornamentation, matters which define scholarship as science and good taste respectively. They are both subservient to a more intimate quality of good style: more intimate, as coming nearer to the artist himself. The otiose, the facile, surplusage: why are these abhorrent to the true literary artist, except because, in literary as in all other art, structure is all-important, felt, or painfully missed, everywhere?—that architectural conception of work, which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigour, unfold and justify the first—a condition of literary art, which, in contradistinction to another quality

of the artist himself, to be spoken of later, I shall call the necessity of mind in style. *design, plan, structure*

15. An acute philosophical writer, the late Dean Mansel (a writer whose works illustrate the literary beauty there may be in closeness, and with obvious repression or economy of a fine rhetorical gift), wrote a book, of fascinating precision in a very obscure subject, to show that all the technical laws of logic are but means of securing, in each and all of its apprehensions, the unity, the strict identity with itself, of the apprehending mind. All the laws of good writing aim at a similar unity or identity of the mind in all the processes by which the word is associated to its import. The term is right, and has its essential beauty when it becomes, in a manner, what it signifies, as with the names of simple sensations. To give the phrase, the sentence, the structural member, the entire composition, song, or essay, a similar unity with its subject and with itself:—style is in the right way when it tends towards that. All depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity of the initiatory apprehension or view. So much is true of all art, which therefore requires always its logic, its comprehensive reason—insight, foresight, retrospect in simultaneous action—true, most of all, of the literary art, as being of all the arts most closely cognate to the abstract intelligence. Such logical coherency may be evidenced not merely in the lines of composition as a whole, but in the choice of a single word, while it by no means interferes with, but may even prescribe, much variety, in the building of the sentence for instance, or in the manner, argumentative, descriptive, discursive, of this or that part or member of the entire design. The blithe, crisp sentence, decisive, as a child's expression of its needs, may alternate with the long-contending, victoriously intricate sentence; the

sentence born with the integrity of a single word, relieving the sort of sentence in which, if you look closely, you can see much contrivance, much adjustment, to bring a highly qualified matter into compass at one view. For the literary architecture, if it is to be rich and expressive, involves not only foresight of the end in the beginning, but also development or growth of design, in the process of execution, with many irregularities, surprises, and after-thoughts; the contingent as well as the necessary being subsumed under the unity of the whole. As truly, to the lack of such architectural design, of a single, almost visual, image, vigorously informing an entire, perhaps very intricate, composition, which shall be austere, ornate, argumentative, fanciful, yet true from first to last to that vision within, may be attributed those weaknesses of conscious or unconscious repetition of word, phrase, motive, or member of the whole matter, indicating, as Flaubert was aware, an original structure in thought not organically complete. With such foresight the actual conclusion will most often get itself written out of hand before, in the more obvious sense, the work is finished. With some strong and leading sense of the world, the tight hold of which secures true *composition* and not mere loose accretion, the literary artist, I suppose, goes on considerately, setting joint to joint, sustained by yet restraining the productive ardour, retracing the negligences of his first sketch, repeating his steps only that he may give the reader a sense of secure and restful progress, readjusting mere assonances even, that they may soothe the reader, or at least not interrupt him on his way; and then, somewhere before the end comes, is burdened, inspired, with his conclusion, and betimes delivered of it, leaving off, not in weariness and because he finds *himself* at an end, but in all the freshness of volition. His work

now structurally complete, with all the accumulating effect of secondary shades of meaning, he finishes the whole up to the just proportion of that ante-penultimate conclusion, and all becomes expressive. The house he has built is rather a body he has informed. And so it happens, to its greater credit, that the better interest even of a narrative to be recounted, a story to be told, will often be in its second reading. And though there are instances of great writers who have been no artists, an unconscious tact sometimes directing work in which we may detect, very pleasurable, many of the effects of conscious art, yet one of the greatest pleasures of really good prose literature is in the critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure, and the pervading sense of it as we read. Yes, of poetic literature, too; for, in truth, the kind of constructive intelligence here supposed is one of the forms of the imagination.

16. That is the special function of mind, in style. Mind and soul:—hard to ascertain philosophically, the distinction is real enough practically, for they often interfere, are sometimes in conflict, with each other. Blake, in the last century, is an instance of preponderating soul, embarrassed, at a loss, in an era of preponderating mind. As a quality of style, at all events, soul is a fact, in certain writers—the way they have of absorbing language, of attracting it into the peculiar spirit they are of, with a subtlety which makes the actual result seem like some inexplicable inspiration. By mind, the literary artist reaches us, through static and objective indications of design in his work, legible to all. By soul, he reaches us, somewhat capriciously perhaps, one and not another, through vagrant sympathy and a kind of immediate contact. Mind we cannot choose but approve where we recognize it; soul may repel us, not because we

misunderstand it. The way in which theological interests sometimes avail themselves of language is perhaps the best illustration of the force I mean to indicate, generally in literature, by the word *soul*. Ardent religious persuasion may exist, may make its way, without finding any equivalent heat in language: or, again, it may enkindle words to various degrees, and when it really takes hold of them doubles its force. Religious history presents many remarkable instances in which, through no mere phrase-worship, an unconscious literary tact has, for the sensitive, laid open a privileged pathway from one to another. “The altar-fire,” people say, “has touched those lips!” The Vulgate, the English Bible, the English Prayer-Book, the writings of Swedenborg, the Tracts for the Times:—there, we have instances of widely different and largely diffused phases of religious feeling in operation as soul in style. But something of the same kind acts with similar power in certain writers of quite other than theological literature, on behalf of some wholly personal and peculiar sense of theirs. Most easily illustrated by theological literature, this quality lends to profane writers a kind of religious influence. At their best, these writers become, as we say sometimes, “prophets”; such character depending on the effect not merely of their matter, but of their matter as allied to, in “electric affinity” with, peculiar form, and working in all cases by an immediate sympathetic contact, on which account it is that it may be called soul, as opposed to mind, in style. And this, too, is a faculty of choosing and rejecting what is congruous or otherwise, with a drift toward unity—unity of atmosphere here, as there of design—soul securing colour (or perfume, might we say?) as mind secures form, the latter being essentially finite, the former vague or infinite, as the influence of a living person is practically infinite. There are some to whom nothing

has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person ; and it is they who best appreciate the quality of soul in literary art. They seem to know a *person*, in a book, and make way by intuition : yet, although they thus enjoy the completeness of a personal information, it is still a characteristic of soul, in this sense of the word, that it does but suggest what can never be uttered, not as being different from, or more obscure than, what actually gets said, but as containing that ~~plenary substance~~ <sup>no one fully as another</sup> of which there is only one phase or facet in what is there expressed.

17. If all high things have their martyrs, Gustave Flaubert might perhaps rank as the martyr of literary style. In his printed correspondence, a curious series of letters, written in his twenty-fifth year, records what seems to have been his one other passion — a series of letters which, with its fine casuistries, its firmly repressed anguish, its tone of harmonious gray, and the sense of disillusion in which the whole matter ends, might have been, a few slight changes supposed, one of his own fictions. Writing to Madame X. certainly he does display, by "taking thought" mainly, by constant and delicate pondering, as in his love for literature, a heart really moved, but still more, and as the pledge of that emotion, a loyalty to his work. Madame X., too, is a literary artist, and the best gifts he can send her are precepts of perfection in art, counsels for the effectual pursuit of that better love. In his love-letters it is the pains and pleasures of art he insists on, its solaces : he communicates secrets, reproves, encourages, with a view to that. Whether the lady was dissatisfied with such divided or indirect service, the reader is not enabled to see ; but sees that, on Flaubert's part at least, a living person could be no rival of what was, from first to last, his leading passion, a somewhat solitary and exclusive one.

"I must scold you," he writes, "for one thing, which shocks, scandalizes me, the small concern, namely, you show for art just now. As regards glory be it so : there, I approve. But for art! — the one thing in life that is good and real — can you compare with it an earthly love? — prefer the adoration of a relative beauty to the *cultus* of the true beauty? Well! I tell you the truth. That is the one thing good in me : the one thing I have, to me estimable. For yourself, you blend with the beautiful a heap of alien things, the useful, the agreeable, what not? —

"The only way not to be unhappy is to shut yourself up in art, and count everything else as nothing. Pride takes the place of all beside when it is established on a large basis. Work! God wills it. That, it seems to me, is clear.—

"I am reading over again the '*Aeneid*,' certain verses of which I repeat to myself to satiety. There are phrases there which stay in one's head, by which I find myself beset, as with those musical airs which are forever returning, and cause you pain, you love them so much. I observe that I no longer laugh much, and am no longer depressed. I am ripe. You talk of my serenity, and envy me. It may well surprise you. Sick, irritated, the prey a thousand times a day of cruel pain, I continue my labour like a true working-man, who, with sleeves turned up, in the sweat of his brow, beats away at his anvil, never troubling himself whether it rains or blows, for hail or thunder. I was not like that formerly. The change has taken place naturally, though my will has counted for something in the matter. —

"Those who write in good style are sometimes accused of a neglect of ideas, and of the moral end, as if the end of the physician were something else than healing, of the painter than painting — as if the end of art were not, before all else, the beautiful."

**18.** What, then, did Flaubert understand by beauty, in the art he pursued with so much fervour, with so much self-command? Let us hear a sympathetic commentator: —

"Possessed of an absolute belief that there exists but one way of expressing one thing, one word to call it by, one adjective to qualify, one verb to animate it, he gave himself to superhuman labour for the discovery, in every phrase, of that word, that verb, that epithet. In this way, he believed in some mysterious harmony of expression, and when a true word seemed to him to lack euphony still went on seeking another, with in-

vincible patience, certain that he had not yet got hold of the *unique* word. . . . A thousand preoccupations would beset him at the same moment, always with this desperate certitude fixed in his spirit : Among all the expressions in the world, all forms and turns of expression, there is but one — one form, one mode — to express what I want to say." *One*

19. The one word for the one thing, the one thought, amid the multitude of words, terms, that might just do : the problem of style was there ! — the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay, or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within. In that perfect justice, over and above the many contingent and removable beauties with which beautiful style may charm us, but which it can exist without, independent of them yet dexterously availing itself of them, omnipresent in good work, in function at every point, from single epithets to the rhythm of a whole book, lay the specific, indispensable, very intellectual, beauty of literature, the possibility of which constitutes it a fine art.

20. One seems to detect the influence of a philosophic idea there, the idea of a natural economy, of some pre-existent adaptation, between a relative, somewhere in the world of thought, and its correlative, somewhere in the world of language — both alike, rather, somewhere in the mind of the artist, desiderative, expectant, inventive — meeting each other with the readiness of "soul and body reunited," in Blake's rapturous design ; and, in fact, Flaubert was fond of giving his theory philosophical expression :—

" There are no beautiful thoughts," he would say, " without beautiful forms, and conversely. As it is impossible to extract from a physical body the qualities which really constitute it — colour, extension, and the like — without reducing it to a hollow abstraction, in a word, without destroying it ; just so it is impossible to detach the form from the idea, for the idea only exists by virtue of the form."

21. All the recognized flowers, the removable ornaments of literature (including harmony and ease in reading aloud, very carefully considered by him) counted certainly ; for these too are part of the actual value of what one says. But still, after all, with Flaubert, the search, the unwearied research, was not for the smooth, or winsome, or forcible word, as such, as with false Ciceronians, but quite simply and honestly, for the word's adjustment to its meaning. The first condition of this must be, of course, to know yourself, to have ascertained your own sense exactly. Then, if we suppose an artist, he says to the reader,—I want you to see precisely what I see. Into the mind sensitive to "form," a flood of random sounds, colours, incidents, is ever penetrating from the world without, to become, by sympathetic selection, a part of its very structure, and, in turn, the visible vesture and expression of that other world it sees so steadily, within, nay, already with a partial conformity thereto, to be refined, enlarged, corrected, at a hundred points ; and it is just there, just at those doubtful points that the function of style, as tact or taste, intervenes. The unique term will come more quickly to one than another, at one time than another, according also to the kind of matter in question. Quickness and slowness, ease and closeness alike, have nothing to do with the artistic character of the true word found at last. As there is a charm of ease, so there is also a special charm in the signs of discovery, of effort and contention toward a due end, as so often with Flaubert himself—in the style which has been pliant, as only obstinate, durable metal can be, to the inherent perplexities and recusancy of a certain difficult thought.

22. If Flaubert had not told us, perhaps we should never have guessed how tardy and painful his own pro-

cedure really was, and after reading his confession may think that his almost endless hesitation had much to do with diseased nerves. Often, perhaps, the felicity supposed will be the product of a happier, a more exuberant nature than Flaubert's. Aggravated, certainly, by a morbid physical condition, that anxiety in "seeking the phrase" which gathered all the other small *ennuis* of a really quiet existence into a kind of battle, was connected with his life-long contention against facile poetry, facile art—art, facile and flimsy; and what constitutes the true artist is not the slowness or quickness of the process, but the absolute success of the result. As with those labourers in the parable, the prize is independent of the mere length of the actual day's work. "You talk," he writes, odd, trying lover, to Madame X.—

"You talk of the exclusiveness of my literary tastes. That might have enabled you to divine what kind of a person I am in the matter of love. I grow so hard to please as a literary artist, that I am driven to despair. I shall end by not writing another line."

**23.** "Happy," he cries, in a moment of discouragement at that patient labour, which for him, certainly, was the condition of a great success—

"Happy those who have no doubts of themselves! who lengthen out, as the pen runs on, all that flows forth from their brains. As for me, I hesitate, I disappoint myself, turn round upon myself in despite: my taste is augmented in proportion as my natural vigour decreases, and I afflict my soul over some dubious word out of all proportion to the pleasure I get from a whole page of good writing. One would have to live two centuries to attain a true idea of any matter whatever. What Buffon said is a big blasphemy: genius is not long-continued patience. Still, there is some truth in the statement, and more than people think, especially as regards our own day. Art! art! art! bitter deception! phantom that glows with light, only to lead one on to destruction."

**24.** Again —

"I am growing so peevish about my writing. I am like a man whose ear is true but who plays falsely on the violin: his fingers refuse to reproduce precisely those sounds of which he has the inward sense. Then the tears come rolling down from the poor scraper's eyes and the bow falls from his hand."

**25.** Coming slowly or quickly, when it comes, as it came with so much labour of mind, but also with so much lustre, to Gustave Flaubert, this discovery of the word will be, like all artistic success and felicity, incapable of strict analysis: effect of an intuitive condition of mind, it must be recognized by a like intuition on the part of the reader, and a sort of immediate sense. In every one of those masterly sentences of Flaubert there was, below all mere contrivance, shaping and afterthought, by some happy instantaneous concourse of the various faculties of the mind with each other, the exact apprehension of what was *needed* to carry the meaning. And that it fits with absolute justice will be a judgment of immediate sense in the appreciative reader. We all feel this in what may be called inspired translation. Well! all language involves translation from inward to outward. In literature, as in all forms of art, there are the absolute and the merely relative or accessory beauties; and precisely in that exact proportion of the term to its purpose is the absolute beauty of style, prose or verse. All the good qualities, the beauties, of verse also, are such, only as precise expression.

**26.** In the highest as in the lowliest literature, then, the one indispensable beauty is, after all, truth: — truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it, in the former; truth there as accuracy, truth here as expression, that finest and most intimate form of truth, the *vraie*

*vérité.* And what an eclectic principle this really is! employing for its one sole purpose—that absolute accordance of expression to idea—all other literary beauties and excellences whatever: how many kinds of style it covers, explains, justifies, and at the same time safeguards! Scott's facility, Flaubert's deeply pondered evocation of "the phrase," are equally good art. Say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, with no surplusage:—there, is the justification of the sentence so fortunately born, "entire, smooth, and round," that it needs no punctuation, and also (that is the point!) of the most elaborate period, if it be right in its elaboration. Here is the office of ornament: here also the purpose of restraint in ornament. As the exponent of truth, that austerity (the beauty, the function, of which in literature Flaubert understood so well) becomes not the correctness or purism of the mere scholar, but a security against the otiose, a jealous exclusion of what does not really tell toward the pursuit of relief, of life and vigour in the portraiture of one's sense. License again, the making free with rule, if it be indeed, as people fancy, a habit of genius, flinging aside or transforming all that opposes the liberty of beautiful production, will be but faith to one's own meaning. The seeming baldness of *Le Rouge et Le Noir* is nothing in itself; the wild ornament of *Les Misérables* is nothing in itself; and the restraint of Flaubert, amid a real natural opulence, only redoubled beauty—the phrase so large and so precise at the same time, hard as bronze, in service to the more perfect adaptation of words to their matter. Afterthoughts, retouchings, finish, will be of profit only so far as they too really serve to bring out the original, initiative, generative, sense in them.

27. In this way, according to the well-known saying, "The style is the man," complex or simple, in his individuality, his plenary sense of what he really has to say, his sense of the world; all cautions regarding style arising out of so many natural scruples as to the medium through which alone he can expose that inward sense of things, the purity of this medium, its laws or tricks of refraction; nothing is to be left there which might give conveyance to any matter save that. Style in all its varieties, reserved or opulent, terse, abundant, musical, stimulant, academic, so long as each is really characteristic or expressive, finds thus its justification, the sumptuous good taste of Cicero being as truly the man himself, and not another, justified, yet insured inalienably to him, thereby, as would have been his portrait by Raffaelle, in full consular splendour, on his ivory chair.

28. A relegation, you may say perhaps—a relegation of style to the subjectivity, the mere caprice, of the individual, which must soon transform it into mannerism. Not so! since there is, under the conditions supposed, for those elements of the man, for every lineament of the vision within, the one word, the one acceptable word, recognizable by the sensitive, by others "who have intelligence" in the matter, as absolutely as ever anything can be in the evanescent and delicate region of human language. The style, the manner, would be the man, not in his unreasoned and really uncharacteristic caprices, involuntary or affected, but in absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him. But let us hear our French guide again.—

"Styles," says Flaubert's commentator, "*Styles*, as so many peculiar moulds, each of which bears the mark of a particular writer, who is to pour into it the whole content of his ideas, were no part of his theory. What he believed in was *Style*: that is to say, a certain absolute and

unique manner of expressing a thing, in all its intensity and colour. For him the *form* was the work itself. As in living creatures, the blood, nourishing the body, determines its very contour and external aspect, just so, to his mind, the *matter*, the basis in a work of art, imposed necessarily, the unique, the just expression, the measure, the rhythm — the *form* in all its characteristics."

29. If the style be the man, in all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense "impersonal." *only word used - is impersonal*

30. I said, thinking of books like Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, that prose literature was the characteristic art of the nineteenth century, as others, thinking of its triumphs since the youth of Bach, have assigned that place to music. Music and prose literature are, in one sense, the opposite terms of art; the art of literature presenting to the imagination, through the intelligence, a range of interests as free and various as those which music presents to it through sense. And certainly the tendency of what has been here said is to bring literature, too, under those conditions, by conformity to which music takes rank as the typically perfect art. If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art.

31. Good art, but not necessarily great art ; the distinction between great art and good art depending immediately, as regards literature at all events, not on its *form*, but on the *matter*. Thackeray's *Esmond*, surely, is greater art than *Vanity Fair*, by the greater dignity of its interests. It is on the quality of the matter it informs or controls, its com-

pass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends, as *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Les Misérables*, *The English Bible*, are great art. Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art; — then, if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I summed up as mind and soul—that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.

## FREDERIC HARRISON

### ON ENGLISH PROSE<sup>1</sup>

1. *Fili mi dilectissime*<sup>2</sup> (if, sir, I may borrow the words of the late Lord Derby when, as Chancellor of the University, he conferred the degree of D.C.L. on Lord Stanley, his son)—I fear that I am about to do an unwise thing. When, in an hour of paternal weakness, I accepted your invitation to address the Bodley Society on *Style*, it escaped me that it was a subject with which undergraduates have but small concern. And now I find myself talking on a matter whereof I know very little, and could do you no good even if I knew much, in presence of an illustrious historian, to say nothing of your own Head, who was an acknowledged master of English when my own literary style aspired to nothing more elegant than the dry forms of pleadings and deeds.

2. Every one knows how futile for any actual result are those elaborate disquisitions on *Style* which some of the most consummate masters have amused themselves in compiling, but which serve at best to show how quite hackneyed truisms can be graced by an almost miraculous neatness of phrase. It is in vain to enjoin on us “propriety,” “justness of expression,” “suitability of our language to

<sup>1</sup> An address to the Bodley Literary Society, Oxford. President, C. René Harrison. Printed in *The Nineteenth Century*, June, 1898, and in *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill, and Other Literary Estimates*, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> [My very delightful son.]

the subject we treat," and all the commonplaces which the schools of Addison and of Johnson in the last century promulgated as canons of good style. "Proper words in proper places," says Swift, "make the true definition of a style." "Each phrase in its right place," says Voltaire. Well! Swift and Voltaire knew how to do this with supreme skill; but it does not help us, if they cannot teach their art. *How* are we to know what is the *proper* word? *How* are we to find the *right* place? And even a greater than Swift or Voltaire is not much more practical as a teacher. "Suit the action to the word, and the word to the action," says Hamlet. "Be not too tame neither. Let your own discretion be your tutor." Can you trust your own discretion? Have undergraduates this discretion? And how could I, in presence of your College authority, suggest that you should have no tutor but your own discretion?

3. All this is as if a music-master were to say to a pupil, Sing always in tune and with the *right* intonation, and whatever you do, produce your voice in the *proper* way! Or, to make myself more intelligible to you here, it is as if W. G. Grace were to tell you, Play a "yorker" in the *right* way, and place the ball in the *proper* spot with reference to the field! We know that neither the art of acting, nor of singing, nor of cricket can be taught by general commonplaces of this sort. And good prose is so far like cricket that the W. G.'s of literature, after ten or twenty "centuries," can tell you nothing more than this—to place your words in the right spot, and to choose the proper word, according to the "field" that you have before you.

4. The most famous essay on Style, I suppose, is that by one of the greatest wizards who ever used language—I mean the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, almost every line of

which has become a household word in the educated world. But what avail his inimitable epigrams in practice? Who is helped by being told not to draw a man's head on a horse's neck, or a beautiful woman with the tail end of a fish? "Do not let brevity become obscurity; do not let your mountain in labour bring forth a mouse; turn over your Greek models night and day; your compositions must be not only correct, but must give delight, touch the heart," and so forth, and so forth. All these imperishable maxims, as clean cut as a sardonyx gem—these "chestnuts," as you call them in the slang of the day — serve as hard nuts for a translator to crack, and as handy mottoes at the head of an essay; but they are barren of any solid food as the shell of a walnut.

5. Then Voltaire, perhaps the greatest master of prose in any modern language, wrote an essay on Style, in the same vein of epigrammatic platitude. No declamation, says he, in a work on physics. No jesting in a treatise on mathematics. Well! but did Douglas Jerrold himself ever try to compose a Comic Trigonometry; and could another Charles Lamb find any fun in Spencer's First Principles? A fine style, says Voltaire, makes anything delightful; but it is exceedingly difficult to acquire, and very rarely found. And all he has to say is, "Avoid grandiloquence, confusion, vulgarity, cheap wit, and colloquial slang in a tragedy." He might as well say, Take care to be as strong as Sandow, and as active as Prince Ranjitsinhji, and whatever you do, take care not to grow a nose like Cyrano de Bergerac in the new play!<sup>Kalisch</sup>

6. An ingenious professor of literature has lately ventured to commit himself to an entire treatise on Style, wherein he has propounded everything that can usefully be said about this art, in a style which illustrates things that you

should avoid. At the end of his book he declares that style cannot be taught. This is true enough; but if this had been the first, instead of the last, sentence of his piece, the book would not have been written at all. I remember that, when I stood for the Hertford Scholarship, we had to write a Latin epigram on the thesis—

*Omnia liberius nullo poscente —*

—*fatemur*, (I replied — )

*Carmina cur poscas, carmine si sit opus?*<sup>1</sup>

And so I say now. Style cannot be taught. And this perhaps puts out of court the professor's essay, and no doubt my own also. Nothing practical can be said about Style. And no good can come to a young student by being anxious about Style. None of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature; no! nor one gem to his English prose, unless nature has endowed him with that rare gift—a subtle ear for the melody of words, a fastidious instinct for the connotations of a phrase.

7. You will, of course, understand that I am speaking of Style in that higher sense as it was used by Horace, Swift, Voltaire, and great writers, that is, Style as an element of permanent literature. It is no doubt very easy by practice and good advice to gain a moderate facility in writing current language, and even to get the trick of turning out lively articles and smart reviews. “ ‘Tis as easy as lying; govern these ventages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music”—quite up to the pitch of the journals and the magazines of our day, of which we are all proud. But

<sup>1</sup> [Everything would come more easily if there were no urging —

—Agreed:

Why do you ask for verses, then, if it's a task to make them?]

this is a poor trade ; and it would be a pity to waste your precious years of young study by learning to play on the literary " recorders." You may be taught to fret them. You will not learn to make them speak !

8. There are a few negative precepts, quite familiar common form, easy to remember, and not difficult to observe. These are all that any manual can lay down. The trouble comes in when we seek to apply them. What is it that is artificial, incongruous, obscure ? How are we to be simple ? Whence comes the music of language ? What is the magic that can charm into life the apt and inevitable word that lies hidden somewhere at hand — so near and yet so far — so willing and yet so coy — did we only know the talisman which can awaken it ? This is what no teaching can give us — what skilful tuition and assiduous practice can but improve in part, and even that only for the chosen few.

9. About Style, in the higher sense of the term, I think the young student should trouble himself as little as possible. When he does, it too often becomes the art of clothing thin ideas in well-made garments. To gain skill in expression before he has got thoughts or knowledge to express, is somewhat premature ; and to waste in the study of form those irrevocable years which should be absorbed in the study of things, is mere decadence and fraud. The young student — *ex hypothesi*<sup>1</sup> — has to learn, not to teach. His duty is to digest knowledge, not to popularize it and carry it abroad. It is a grave mental defect to parade an external polish far more mature than the essential matter within. Where the learner is called on to express his thoughts in formal compositions — and the less he does this the better — it is enough that he put his ideas or his knowledge (if he has any) in clear and natural terms. But

<sup>1</sup> [According to the hypothesis, or theory.]

the less he labours the flow of his periods the more truly is he the honest learner, the less is his risk of being the smug purveyor of the crudities with which he has been crammed, the further is he from becoming one of those voluble charlatans whom the idle study of language so often breeds.

10. I look with sorrow on the habit which has grown up in the university since my day (in the far-off fifties)— the habit of making a considerable part of the education of the place to turn on the art of serving up gobbets of prepared information in essays more or less smooth and correct— more or less successful imitations of the viands that are cooked for us daily in the press. I have heard that a student has been asked to write as many as seven essays in a week, a task which would exhaust the fertility of a Swift. The bare art of writing readable paragraphs in passable English is easy enough to master ; one that steady practice and good coaching can teach the average man. But it is a poor art, which readily lends itself to harm. It leads the shallow ones to suppose themselves to be deep, the raw ones to fancy they are cultured, and it burdens the world with a deluge of facile commonplace. It is the business of a university to train the mind to think and to impart solid knowledge, not to turn out nimble penmen who may earn a living as the clerks and salesmen of literature.

11. Almost all that can be laid down as law about Style is contained in a sentence of Madame de Sévigné in her twentieth letter to her daughter. “*Ne quittez jamais le naturel,*” she says ; “*votre tour s'y est formé, et cela compose un style parfait.*” I suppose I must translate this ; for Madame de Sévigné is no subject for modern research, and our *Alma Mater* is concerned only with dead languages and remote epochs. “*Never forsake what is natural,*” she

writes ; " you have moulded yourself in that vein, and this produces a perfect style." There is nothing more to be said. Be natural, be simple, be yourself : shun artifices, tricks, fashions. Gain the tone of ease, plainness, self-respect. To thine own self be true. Speak out frankly that which you have thought out in your own brain and have felt within your own soul. This, and this alone, creates a perfect style, as she says who wrote the most exquisite letters the world has known.

12. And so Molière, a consummate master of language and one of the soundest critics of any age, in that immortal scene of his *Misanthrope*, declares the euphuistic sonnets of the Court to be mere play of words, pure affectation, not worth a snatch from a peasant's song. That is not the way in which nature speaks, cries Alceste — *J'aime mieux ma mie*<sup>1</sup> — that is how the heart gives utterance, without *colifichets*, with no quips and cranks of speech, very dear to fancy, and of very liberal conceit. And Sainte-Beuve cites an admirable saying : " All peasants have style." They speak as nature prompts. They have never learned to play with words ; they have picked up no tricks, mannerisms, and affectation like Osric and Oronte in the plays. They were not trained to write essays, and never got veterans to discourse to them on Style. Yet, as Sainte-Beuve says, they have style, because they have human nature, and they have never tried to get outside the natural, the simple, the homely. It is the secret of Wordsworth, as it was of Goldsmith, as it was of Homer.

13. Those masters of style of whom I have spoken were almost all French — Molière, Madame de Sévigné, Voltaire, Sainte-Beuve. Style, in truth, is a French art ; there is hardly any other style in prose. I doubt if any English

<sup>1</sup> [I love my sweetheart better.]

prose, when judged by the canons of perfect style, can be matched with the highest triumphs of French prose. The note of the purest French is a serene harmony of tone, an infallible nicety of keeping, a brightness and point never spasmodic, never careless, never ruffled, like the unvarying manner of a gentleman who is a thorough man of the world. Even our best English will sometimes grow impetuous, impatient, or slack, as if it were too much trouble to maintain an imperturbable air of quite inviolable good-breeding. In real life no people on earth, or perhaps we ought to say in Europe, in this surpass the English gentleman. In prose literature it is a French gift, and seems given as yet to the French alone. Italians, Spaniards, and Russians have an uncertain, casual, and fitful style, and Germans since Heine have no style at all.

**14.** Whilst we have hundreds of men and women to-day who write good English, and one or two who have a style of their own, our French critics will hardly admit that we show any example of the purest style when judged by their own standard of perfection. They require a combination of simplicity, ease, charm, precision, and serenity of tone, together with the memorable phrase and inimitable felicity which stamp the individual writer, and yet are obvious and delightful to every reader. Renan had this; Pierre Loti has it; Anatole France has it. But it is seldom that we read a piece of current English and feel it to be exquisite in form, apart from its substance, refreshing as a work of art, and yet hall-marked from the mint of the one particular author. We have hall-marks enough, it is true, only too noisily conspicuous on the plate; but are they refreshing and inspiring? are they works of art? How is it that our poetry, even our minor poetry of the day, has its own felicitous harmony of tone, whilst our

prose is notoriously wanting in that mellow refinement of form which the French call Style.

15. If I hazard a few words about some famous masters of language, I must warn you that judgments of this kind amount to little more than the likes and dislikes of the critic himself. There are no settled canons, and no accepted arbiter, of the elegances of prose. It is more or less a matter of personal taste, even more than it is in verse. I never doubt that the greatest master of prose in recorded history is Plato. He alone (like Homer in poetry) is perfect. He has every mood, and all are faultless. He is easy, lucid, graceful, witty, pathetic, imaginative by turns; but in all kinds he is natural and inimitably sweet. He is never obscure, never abrupt, never tedious, never affected. He shows us as it were his own Athene, wisdom incarnate in immortal radiance of form.

16. Plato alone is faultless. I will not allow any Roman to be perfect. Cicero even in his letters is wordy, rhetorical, academic. Livy is too consciously painting in words, too sonorous and diffuse for perfection; as Tacitus carries conciseness into obscurity and epigram into paradox. Of Latin prose, for my own part, I value most the soldierly simplicity of Cæsar, though we can hardly tell if he could be witty, graceful, pathetic, and fantastic as we see these gifts in Plato.

17. One of the most suggestive points in the history of prose is Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, where a style of strange fascination suddenly starts into life with hardly any earlier models, nay, two or three centuries earlier than organic prose in any of the tongues of Europe. For many generations the exquisite ease and melody of Boccaccio's language found no rival in any modern nation, nor had it any rival in Italy, and we have no evidence that anything in Italy

had prepared the way for it. It is far from a perfect style, for it is often too fluid, loose, and voluminous for mature prose; but as a first effort towards an orderly array of lucid narrative, it is an amazing triumph of the Italian genius for art.

**18.** Prose, as you all know, is always and everywhere a plant of much later growth than poetry. Plato came four or five centuries after Homer; Tacitus came two centuries later than Lucretius; Machiavelli came two centuries after Dante; Voltaire a century after Corneille; Addison a century after Shakespeare. And while the prose of Boccaccio, with all its native charm, can hardly be called an organic, mature, and mellow style, in poetry, for nearly a century before Boccaccio, Dante and the minor lyrists of Italy had reached absolute perfection of rhythmical form.

**19.** Although fairly good prose is much more common than fairly good verse, yet I hold that truly fine prose is more rare than truly fine poetry. I trust that it will be counted neither a whim nor a paradox if I give it as a reason that mastery in prose is an art more difficult than mastery in verse. The very freedom of prose, its want of conventions, of settled prosody, of musical inspiration, give wider scope for failure and afford no beaten paths. Poetry glides swiftly down the stream of a flowing and familiar river, where the banks are always the helmsman's guide. Prose puts forth its lonely skiff upon a boundless sea, where a multitude of strange and different crafts are cutting about in contrary directions. At any rate, the higher triumphs of prose come later and come to fewer than do the great triumphs of verse.

**20.** When I lately had to study a body of despatches and State papers of the latter half of the sixteenth century, written in six modern languages of Europe, I observed

that the Italian alone in that age was a formed and literary language, at the command of all educated men and women, possessed of organic canons and a perfectly mature type. The French, German, Dutch, English, and Spanish of that age, as used for practical ends, were still in the state of a language held in solution before it assumes a crystallized form. Even the men who wrote correct Latin could not write their own language with any real command. At the death of Tennyson, we may remember, it was said that no less than sixty-two poets were thought worthy of the wreath of bay. Were there six writers of prose whom even a log-rolling confederate would venture to hail as a possible claimant of the crown? Assiduous practice in composing neat essays has turned out of late ten thousand men and women who can put together very pleasant prose. It has not turned out one living master in prose as Tennyson was master in verse.

**21.** I have spoken of Voltaire as perhaps the greatest master of prose in any modern language, but this does not mean that he is perfect, and without qualification or want. His limpid clearness, ease, sparkle, and inexhaustible self-possession have no rival in modern tongues, and are almost those of Plato himself. But he is no Plato; he never rises into the pathos, imagination, upper air of the empyrean, to which the mighty Athenian can soar at will. Voltaire is never tedious, wordy, rhetorical, or obscure; and this can be said of hardly any other modern but Heine and Swift. My edition of Voltaire is in sixty volumes, of which some forty are prose; and in all those twenty thousand pages of prose not one is dull or laboured. We could not say this of the verse. But I take *Candide* or *Zadig* to be the high-water mark of easy French prose, wanting no doubt in the finer elements of pathos, dignity,

and power. And for this reason many have preferred the prose of Rousseau, of George Sand, of Renan, though all of these are apt at times to degenerate into garrulity and gush. There was no French prose, says Voltaire, before Pascal; and there has been none of the highest flight since Renan. In the rest of Europe perfect prose has long been as rare as the egg of the great auk.

22. In spite of the splendour of Bacon and of Milton, of Jeremy Taylor, and of Hooker, and whatever be the virility of Bunyan and Dryden, I cannot hold that the age of mature English prose had been reached until we come to Defoe, Swift, Addison, Berkeley, and Goldsmith. These are the highest types we have attained. Many good judges hold Swift to be our Voltaire, without defect or equal. I should certainly advise the ambitious essayist to study Swift for instruction, by reason of the unfailing clearness, simplicity, and directness of his style. But when we come to weigh him by the highest standard of all, we find Swift too uniformly pedestrian, too dry; wanting in variety, in charm, in melody, in thunder, and in flash. The grandest prose must be like the vault of heaven itself, passing from the freshness of dawn to the warmth of a serene noon, and anon breaking forth into a crashing storm. Swift sees the sun in one uniform radiance of cool light, but it never fills the air with warmth, nor does it ever light the welkin with fire.

23. Addison, with all his mastery of tone, seems afraid to give his spirit rein. *Il s'écoute quand il parle:*<sup>1</sup> and this, by the way, is the favourite sin of our best moderns. We see him pause at the end of each felicitous sentence to ask himself if he has satisfied all the canons as to pro-

<sup>1</sup> [He listens while he speaks, or, loosely, he writes with his ear on the ground.]

priety of diction. Even in the *Spectator* we never altogether forget the author of *Cato*. Now, we perceive no canons of good taste, no tragic buskin, no laborious modulations in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which in its own vein is the most perfect type of eighteenth-century prose. Dear old Goldie! There is ease, pellucid simplicity, wit, pathos. I doubt if English prose has ever gone further, or will go further or higher.

**24.** After all I have said, I need not labour the grounds on which I feel Johnson, Burke, Gibbon, Macaulay, and Carlyle to be far from perfect as writers and positively fatal if taken as models. Old Samuel's Ciceronian pomp has actually dimmed our respect for his good sense and innate robustness of soul. Burke was too great an orator to be a consummate writer, as he was too profound a writer to be a perfect orator. Gibbon's imperial eagles pass on in one unending triumph, with the resounding blare of brazen trumpets, till we weary of the serried legions and grow dizzy with the show. And as to Macaulay and Carlyle, they carry emphasis to the point of exhaustion; for the peer bangs down his fist to clinch every sentence, and "Sartor" never ceases his uncouth gesticulations and grimace.

**25.** In our own century, Charles Lamb and Thackeray, I think, come nearest to Voltaire and Madame de Sévigné in purity of diction, in clearness, ease, grace, and wit. But a living writer—now long silent and awaiting his summons to the eternal silence—had powers which, had he cared to train them before he set about to reform the world, would have made him the noblest master who ever used the tongue of Milton. Need I name the versatile genius who laboured here in Oxford so long and with such success? In the mass of his writings John Ruskin has

struck the lyre of prose in every one of its infinite notes. He has been lucid, distinct, natural, fanciful, humorous, satiric, majestic, mystical, and prophetic by turns as the spirit moved within him. No Englishman — hardly Milton himself — has ever so completely mastered the tonic resources of English prose, its majesty and wealth of rhythm, the flexibility, mystery, and infinitude of its mighty diapason.

**26.** Alas! the pity of it. These incomparable descants are but moments and interludes, and are too often chanted forth in mere wantonness of emotion. Too often they lead us on to formless verbosity and a passionate rhetoric, such as blind even temperate critics to the fact, that it is possible to pick out of the books of John Ruskin whole pages which in harmony, power, and glow have no match in the whole range of our prose.

**27.** And now I know I must not end without hazarding a few practical hints — what betting men and undergraduates call “tips” — for general remarks upon literature have little interest for those whose mind runs on sports, and perhaps even less for those whose mind is absorbed in the schools. But as there are always some who dream of a life of “letters,” an occupation already too crowded and far from inviting at the best, they will expect me to tell them how I think they may acquire a command of Style. I know no reason why they should, and I know no way they could set about it. But, supposing one has something to say — something that it concerns the world to know — and this, for a young student, is a considerable claim, “a large order,” I think he calls it in the current dialect, all I have to tell him is this: Think it out quite clearly in your own mind, and then put it down in the simplest words that offer, just as if you were telling it to a friend, but dropping the tags of the day with which your

spoken discourse would naturally be garnished. Be familiar, but by no means vulgar. At any rate, be easy, colloquial if you like, but shun those vocables which come to us across the Atlantic, or from Newmarket and Whitechapel, with which the gilded youth and journalists "up-to-date" love to salt their language. Do not make us "sit up" too much, or always "take a back seat"; do not ask us to "ride for a fall," to "hurry up," or "boom it all we know." Nothing is more irritating in print than the iteration of slang, and those stale phrases with which "the half-baked" seek to convince us that they are "in the swim" and "going strong"—if I may borrow the language of the day—that Volapük of the smart and knowing world. It offends me like the reek of last night's tobacco.

**28.** It is a good rule for a young writer to avoid more than twenty or thirty words without a full stop, and not to put more than two commas in each sentence, so that its clauses should not exceed three. This, of course, only in practice. There is no positive law. A fine writer can easily place in a sentence one hundred words, and five or six minor clauses with their proper commas and colons. Ruskin was wont to toss off two or three hundred words and five-and-twenty commas without a pause. But even in the hand of such a magician this ends in failure, and is really grotesque in effect, for no such sentence can be spoken aloud. A beginner can seldom manage more than twenty-five words in one sentence with perfect ease. Nearly all young writers, just as men did in the early ages of prose composition, drift into ragged, preposterous, inorganic sentences, without beginning, middle, or end, which they ought to break into two or three.

**29.** And then they hunt up terms that are fit for science,

poetry, or devotion. They affect "evolution" and "factors," "the interaction of forces," "the co-ordination of organs"; or else everything is "weird," or "opalescent," "debonair," and "enamelled," so that they will not call a spade a spade. I do not say, stick to Saxon words and avoid Latin words as a law of language, because English now consists of both: good and plain English prose needs both. We seldom get the highest poetry without a large use of Saxon, and we hardly reach precise and elaborate explanation without Latin terms. Try to turn *precise and elaborate explanation* into strict Saxon; and then try to turn "Our Father, which art in heaven" into pure Latin words. No! current English prose—not the language of poetry or of prayer—must be of both kinds, Saxon and Latin. But wherever a Saxon word is enough, use it; because if it have all the fulness and the precision you need, it is the more simple, the more direct, the more homely.

30. Never quote anything that is not apt and new. Those stale citations of well-worn lines give us a cold shudder, as does a pun at a dinner-party. A familiar phrase from poetry or Scripture may pass when imbedded in your sentence. But to show it round as a nugget which you have just picked up is the innocent freshman's snare. Never imitate any writer, however good. All imitation in literature is a mischief, as it is in art. A great and popular writer ruins his followers and mimics as did Raffaelle and Michelangelo; and when he founds a school of style, he impoverishes literature more than he enriches it. Johnson, Macaulay, Carlyle, Dickens, Ruskin, have been the cause of flooding us with cheap copies of their special manner. And even now Meredith, Stevenson, Swinburne, and Pater lead the weak to ape their airs and graces. All imitation in literature is an evil. I say to you, as Mat

Arnold said to me (who surely needed no such warning), "Flee Carlylese as the very devil!" Yes, flee Carlylese, Ruskinese, Meredithe, and every other *ese*, past, present, and to come. A writer whose style invites imitation so far falls short of being a true master. He becomes the parent of caricature, and frequently he gives lessons in caricature himself.

31. Though you must never imitate any writer, you may study the best writers with care. And for study choose those who have founded no school, who have no special and imitable style. Read Pascal and Voltaire in French; Swift, Hume, and Goldsmith in English; and of the moderns, I think, Thackeray and Froude. Ruskin is often too rhapsodical for a student; Meredith too whimsical; Stevenson too "precious," as they love to call it; George Eliot too laboriously enamelled and erudite. When you cannot quietly enjoy a picture for the curiosity aroused by its so-called "brushwork," the painting may be a surprising sleight-of-hand, but is not a masterpiece.

32. Read Voltaire, Defoe, Swift, Goldsmith, and you will come to understand how the highest charm of words is reached without your being able to trace any special element of charm. The moment you begin to pick out this or that felicity of phrase, this or that sound of music in the words, and directly it strikes you as eloquent, lyrical, pictorial—then the charm is snapped. The style may be fascinating, brilliant, impressive; but it is not perfect.

33. Of melody in style I have said nothing; nor indeed can anything practical be said. It is a thing infinitely subtle, inexplicable, and rare. If your ear does not hear the false note, the tautophony or the cacophony in the written sentence, as you read it or frame it silently to yourself, and hear it thus inaudibly long before your eye

can pick it forth out of the written words, nay, even when the eye fails to localize it by analysis at all—then you have no inborn sense of the melody of words, and be quite sure that you can never acquire it. One living Englishman has it in the highest form; for the melody of Ruskin's prose may be matched with that of Milton and Shelley. I hardly know any other English prose which retains the ring of that ethereal music—echoes of which are more often heard in our poetry than in our prose. Nay, since it is beyond our reach, wholly incommunicable, defiant of analysis and rule, it may be more wise to say no more.

**34.** Read Swift, Defoe, Goldsmith, if you care to know what is pure English. I need hardly tell you to read another and a greater Book. The Book which begot English prose still remains its supreme type. The English Bible is the true school of English literature. It possesses every quality of our language in its highest form — except for scientific precision, practical affairs, and philosophic analysis. It would be ridiculous to write an essay on metaphysics, a political article, or a novel in the language of the Bible. Indeed, it would be ridiculous to write anything at all in the language of the Bible. But if you care to know the best that our literature can give in simple noble prose—mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures in the English tongue.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

THE notes and questions which follow are designed to suggest to the student and teacher profitable lines of critical investigation with regard to the problem of style in general and the foregoing essays in particular. In reading essays of this sort a student should always strive to grasp the ideas which the author has presented and to state accurately his point of view. One should not be content with accepting general aphorisms, but should critically examine them to see how far they rest in reality of some sort. The kind of fact expounded by the writer and the sanction for the fact is what is important.

### NEWMAN

The distinction drawn by Newman between Literature and Science is that commonly made, but is here stated in a more extreme way than is probably the fact; since the two forms are not opposed by a great gulf but shade into one another. Whether the distinction corresponds to actual states of consciousness, whether, that is, there is a thing in itself apart from the individual perception and thought of it, is a question of philosophy and psychology rather than art. The distinction, however, is a convenient point of departure for the study of the theory of style, because, contrary to Newman's evident meaning, the question is often raised as to whether the exposition of fact may have the quality called style. The question is frequently answered in a quibbling way by recognition of the so-called "scientific" style, or style of science, expression, that is, in which the dry qualities of good exposition are manifest. The chief characteristic of literature, repeatedly insisted on in this essay, is its expression of ideas peculiar to the writer and speaker, the writer's "sense of fact," as Pater puts it (p. 288). The secondary character is its permanence (paragraph 7), as is evident in the dependence of literature on the written rather than the spoken word; speech, however, according to Newman, best illustrates the origin and general character of literary expression.

1. What is Newman's distinction between Philosophy and Letters? Between Science and Literature? Cf. Ruskin: *The Pathetic Fallacy*, in *Modern Painters*, Part IV, Chapter 12; Arnold: *Literature and Science*, in *Discourses in America*; Huxley: *Science and Culture*; and for a general list of references Gayley and Scott: *Literary Criticism*, pp. 203 f.

2. What is meant in paragraph 1 by "fine writing"?

3. Exound the alleged fallacious view of style attacked by Newman in paragraphs 2-5. How far is his answer in paragraphs 25 and 26 a sound one?

4. From what points of view does Newman treat style? Is his use of the term unequivocal? Note and explain any discrepancies in the following extracts and try to formulate a definition of style from them:—

“Literature uses language in its full compass, as including phraseology, idiom, style, composition, rhythm, eloquence, and whatever other properties are included in it” (paragraph 9).

“Style is a thinking out into language” (paragraph 11. Cf. paragraphs 12, 13, and 14).

“Who will not recognize in the vision of Mirza a delicacy and beauty of style which is very difficult to describe, but which is felt to be in exact correspondence to the ideas of which it is the expression?” (Paragraph 14.)

“And, since the thoughts and reasonings of an author have, as I have said, a personal character, no wonder that his style is not only the image of his subject, but of his mind” (paragraph 15. Cf. paragraph 24).

“In this point of view, doubtless, many or most writers are elaborate; and those certainly not the least whose style is furthest removed from ornament, being simple and natural or vehement, or severely business-like and practical” (paragraph 23).

“The Art of Letters is the method by which a speaker or writer brings out in words, worthy of his subject, and sufficient for his audience or readers, the thoughts which impress him” (paragraph 32).

5. How far is Newman's defence of Cicero (paragraph 19) a sound one? May not a distinction be drawn between a so-called imaginative writer like Shakspere and an argumentative writer, i.e. a writer dealing in propositions like Cicero, a distinction which Newman possibly overlooks? Is the phrase “The development of the inner man” (paragraph 19) “question-begging”? Why may it not be used in defence of Dr. Johnson, Isocrates, and the sophists whom Newman attacks in paragraph 20? Where do you draw the line between a legitimate style and that, for instance, burlesqued by Swift in *A Critical Essay on the Faculties of the Mind*? How far is the distinction drawn by Newman between the various arts (paragraph 26) a sound one? (Cf. Lessing's *Laocoön*.) Do you note any fallacy in the analogy between the different arts and different languages? (Paragraph 26.)

6. Compare Newman's fundamental idea of translation with that of Matthew Arnold in *On Translating Homer*.

7. What is your opinion of Newman's idea of literary elaboration in paragraphs 21-23? Cite other instances of men who “have taken extreme pains,” as Ruskin says. Note that Newman himself never wrote rapidly and readily. He often wrote chapters “over and over again,” a practice which he maintained late in life (Letter of April 13, 1869).

8. What are some of the characteristics of Newman's own style? Note the last two sections of the selection, and compare them in wording and substance with the first section. Do you note similar bursts of eloquence in other chapters of Newman? Examine *The Idea of a University* and *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. Examine carefully his wording and sentence structure in section 9, especially at the opening of paragraph 33. Why is the writing good?

### DE QUINCEY

De Quincey's essay is one of the most important and most readable on the subject. Renton (*The Logic of Style*, p. 11) justly remarks: "The appearance of De Quincey, in fact, constitutes the second momentum in the history of style"; the first was that of Aristotle. Certainly the value of the essay arises not only from De Quincey's very entertaining manner, but also, even more, from his willingness to analyze real phenomena and his avoidance of merely *a priori* considerations.

### PART I

The student will find it helpful to draw up an outline of the ideas expressed by De Quincey. This will serve as a point of departure for the comparison of De Quincey with the writers who follow.

1. What does De Quincey mean by style? (See especially paragraphs 4, 30, and 31.) How is his point of view expressed in his discussion of music and in the word *power*? (Paragraph 2. Cf. his famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power in *The Poetry of Pope*.) How in the sentences (paragraph 6), "Like boys who are throwing the sun's rays into the eyes of a mob by means of a mirror, you must shift your lights and vibrate your reflections at every possible angle, if you would agitate the popular mind extensively" (cf. Spencer's doctrine of economy), and "The true art for such popular display is to contrive the best forms for appearing to say something new when in reality you are but echoing yourself; to break up massy chords into running vibrations; and to insert, by slight differences of manner, a virtual identity in the structure"? (Cf. Stevenson's view of style.)

2. What is De Quincey's view of the importance of style (paragraph 4)? of the relativity of style (paragraphs 4 and 6)? State his ideas on diction (paragraphs 9-16); of sentences (paragraphs 16-26). What does he say regarding French style? (Paragraphs 2 and 17-24. Cf. M. Arnold: *The Influence of Academies*, and F. Brunetière: *French Mastery of Style*.) What does he mean by *Organology* and *Mechanology*? (Paragraph 30.) How does this last correspond to Stevenson's idea expressed in this volume?

What does he mean by *Surplusage*? (Paragraph 27. Note how Pater makes the word the central thesis of his essay.) By *style coupé* and *style soutenu*? (Paragraph 31.)

3. What should you say of the breadth of De Quincey's view of style in paragraphs 1-8? Compare it with that of Newman, Spencer, Stevenson, and Pater. Does De Quincey confine his discussion to literature? What of the principle of procedure in the first sentence of paragraph 30? What of his view (paragraph 10) of the states of mind which result in a good style? Can the principle be applied on a large scale to such writers as, say, Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Arnold, and Stevenson? Are De Quincey's strictures on professional writers sound? What of his epigram (paragraph 10): "Authors have always been a dangerous class for any language"? What of his strictures on newspaper style? (Paragraph 13.) Cf. Professor Scott's note: "In this country newspapers have exerted two forms of influence which run directly counter to those noted by De Quincey: (1) They have substituted, even in the treatment of the most serious themes, the language of common life for that of books. (2) They have cultivated a nervous, staccato style of sentences which has almost driven out of vogue the formal periods of the British 'leader.'" (Ed. p. 20.) Cf. De Quincey's *Essays on Style, Rhetoric, and Language*. In general, test De Quincey's generalizations by the facts at your disposal.

## PART II

The interest of this part of the essay is historical—or De Quincey-cal—rather than scientific. De Quincey admits at the outset that his attempt at analysis of the phenomena of style has failed, and that he is therefore driven back to the development, or growth, method of treatment. In this it is characteristic that he attempts to find the origin of prose style in the time, the material, and the audience,—in short, the occasion,—instead of treating the subject formally. His view of composition (paragraphs 14-18) is also characteristic, and it serves to explain his dislike of Socrates and Plato, concerning whom his opinion should be compared with that of Mr. Harrison in this volume. The student should draw up an outline of the essay, but no special questions seem necessary here.

## PART III

De Quincey, though hardly making good his promise expressed in paragraph 3, to clean up all obstacles to the proper study of style, is, nevertheless, suggestive and interesting. As usual he is discursive and somewhat fanciful, but, as usual also, he presents valuable theses and is on the road to legitimate inquiry—the referring to the actual phenomena for his theories. Here the chief point of interest lies in his allegation that the products of the human

intellect tend to gather into groups. The problem of style, as he states it (paragraph 4), is an interesting one, and his desire to find explanation and to expound the principle of literary evolution, though not new with him, is in accord with the more recent attempts, as those of F. Brunetière (*L'Évolution des genres*), to trace the growth of form. De Quincey, however, clings, with characteristic tenacity, to ideas.

#### PART IV

This part of De Quincey's essay is one of the most convincing and suggestive of the essays on style. The student should make an analysis of it to get a clear idea of the main thesis—the effect of external conditions on style.

1. In general, what does De Quincey say of the condition of style in Greece and among the schoolmen? To what degree can his thesis be carried out regarding the comparative success of different forms of literature at present in popular vogue? (Cf. R. L. O'Brien: *Machinery and English Style*.) Is he wholly right in his idea of the value of retrenchment? (Paragraph 20.) Cf. Mr. John Morley's *Essay on Macaulay*: "No writer can now expect to attain the widest popularity unless he gives the world *multa* as well as *multum*"; and, in general, note the career of eminent and popular novelists and playwrights. How of his view regarding the dependence of literature on public sympathy? (Paragraph 22.) Cf. Pater's view of the aim of good writing.

2. How does De Quincey's definition of style (paragraphs 3 and 12) here differ from that in Part I?

#### SPENCER

Spencer's essay is probably the most serious attempt in English to treat style, not as a series of rules, but as a principle based on some sort of reality. The reality here, as with Aristotle, rests in knowledge of the capacity of the reader or hearer,—with Aristotle, in addition to that, of the kind of ideas likely to affect the audience,—and this principle Spencer states as that of the economy of the reader's attention. This principle implies actual knowledge of the psychology of the audience, and is hence more valuable than series of distinct and arbitrary rules could be, than even the telling suggestiveness of De Quincey. Spencer, however, does not do more than state his theory of economy; his illustrations are of the same *a priori* character, for the most part, as are those often found previous to his writing. The real following out of his theory would require a vast deal of fact gathered from actual experience with audiences and readers, or that same knowledge rightly generalized into psychological law.

Students are advised to consult Professor F. N. Scott's excellent edition of the essay.

i. State the thesis which underlies Spencer's essay. What, according to him, would constitute a good style ; or how is style to be judged ? Draw up a brief of the essay so as to show how he carries out the "principle of economy" in various elements and forms of discourse. How is "economy" obtained in wording ? How by the structure of sentences ? What is Spencer's theory of the position of adjectives and substantives ? (Paragraphs 11-13.) Of verb and adverb ? (Paragraph 14.) What does he mean by the terms *direct style* and *indirect style* ? (Paragraph 24.) What is Spencer's theory of the superiority of poetry to prose ? (Paragraphs 44-51.) What is meant by the epigram "To have a specific style is to be poor in speech" ? By "the ideal writer" ? (Paragraphs 61 and 62.)

ii. To what degree is Spencer's theory to be regarded as merely a matter of theory, and to what degree is it supported by the facts of experience ? The question is an important one, and an answer may be suggested by the following queries on the details of the essay. It must be borne in mind that Spencer's thesis is, that style is good in so far as it communicates thought easily to the reader or hearer, a thesis which obviously rests, in its application, on knowledge of the workings of the human mind : —

a. How far is Spencer's theory of words borne out by actual practice ? Compare Greenough and Kittredge: *Words and their Ways in English Speech*; Bréal: *Essai de Sémantique*; Jespersen: *Recent Progress in Language*. Does the term *strongest effects* (paragraph 4. Cf. Scott's edition) really tell us anything ? How far is Spencer's doctrine of the superiority of Anglo-Saxon words (cf. his own diction) applicable to idiomatic expression ? Test Spencer's idea by reference to the vocabularies of eminent and popular English poets and prose writers, in order to see how it squares with the facts. Apply the same principle of procedure to Spencer's approval of specific rather than general terms (paragraph 10), and compare the theory with Buffon's defence of general terms in his *Discours sur le style* and Brunetière's similar thesis in *The French Mastery of Style*.

b. How far is Spencer right in saying that "black" causes no image ? (Paragraph 12. Cf. Professor Scott's edition, p. 8, note 2, and p. 11, note 1.) Is there really "less liability to produce premature conceptions" in one arrangement of the sentence in paragraph 22 than in the other ? Even if so, may not the danger be offset in some other way ? What are the facts as determined by actual trial ? Can you cite instances where "succession" is not "from the less specific to the more specific — from the abstract to the concrete" ? (Paragraph 21.)

c. Test Spencer's doctrine of the superiority of poetry to prose by the facts at your command (paragraph 44). Does poetry please us wholly because

of its rhythm, metre, etc., the phenomena on which Spencer mainly dwells ? Does poetry obey "all the laws of effective speech" ? (Paragraph 47.) What are they ? Does Spencer's assertion cover different *genres* of poetry ?

d. In Part II, does Spencer do more than explain by means of psychological theory the time-honoured principles of climax, anticlimax, and antithesis ? Is the doctrine stated in particular or general terms ?

e. To what point is the law stated in paragraph 39 capable of particular and practical application ? "Evidently, if there be any obscurity in the meaning or application of it [the metaphor], no economy of attention will be gained ; but rather the reverse." How sound is the analogy in paragraph 26 ? Would the "weak mind" really grasp the entire thought even if presented in bits ? Why, as Scott points out, should a sentence be called "inferior" (paragraph 58) if it accomplishes its purpose ? Do you note other instances of vagueness and question-begging terms in the essay ?

3. From what point of view does Spencer consider style ? Are there other points of view from which it might be regarded ? Compare the essays of Newman, Pater, and Stevenson. How far may Spencer's generalization be said to cover them ? (Cf. T. H. Wright's critique in Scott's edition.) Does the theory account for "defective" qualities of style ? To what degree does his theory underlie any good work or treatise on rhetoric with which you are familiar ? Compare what he says in paragraph 1 about the teaching of rhetoric and his words in paragraph 2 about rhetorical theory with what you know or can ascertain of the facts (see Scott's edition, p. 2, note 1). Is the line of investigation suggested in paragraph 60 a sound one ? How far has Spencer's essay influenced the course of modern study of rhetoric ? (Not an easy question.) How far is it valuable in practice ?

### LEWES

#### *The Principle of Beauty*

The value of Lewes's essay evidently rests in its stimulating character, its refreshing and mainly sensible attitude of mind, and its suggestion of the right line of investigation. Otherwise, from the scientific point of view, it is pretty vague ; Lewes does little more than to say that there is a principle of beauty, and that a writer should be true to himself. This fact will be clearer to the student if he will make a summary of the essay, to see exactly what ideas he gets, just what contribution Lewes has made to his knowledge, and just what is meant by the "principle of beauty." The following questions will be helpful :—

i. Can you define exactly what is meant by the "principle of beauty" ? Does the term, like Pater's "soul in style," for example, stand for anything else

than something vague that Lewes and many other people have liked, or does it state a definite reality? To what degree does Lewes explain the "laws" (paragraph 4) scientifically, *i.e.* to what degree does he give us real knowledge of them? How far does he carry out the line of inquiry suggested in paragraph 5?

In detail, comment on such phrases as the following, with due regard, naturally, to the context: —

"There was no demonstration of any psychological demand on the part of the audience for precisely five acts" (paragraph 6). What does this tell you of Lewes's point of view? Is the canon which he condemns, after all, originally, merely a formal one?

"Humbly obedient to the truth proclaimed by their own souls" (paragraph 7). Would not this phrase and others like it (*passim*) justify any number of "thoughts that burn" or "rank and sprawling weeds of speech"? How does Lewes modify such doctrine of complete freedom of utterance?

"The ends of literature and the laws of human nature" (paragraph 7). What are these ends and these laws?

"It springs from a deeper source" (paragraph 10). Does Lewes tell us anything about that source?

"And here lies the great lesson writers have to learn, namely, that they should think of the immediate purpose of their writing, which is to convey truths and emotions, in symbols and images, intelligible and suggestive" (paragraph 11). To what degree does Lewes here abandon his thesis of originality, since expression obviously makes use of words which have been employed over and over again? (Cf. paragraph 14.)

"Write what you can, and if you have the grace of felicitous expression or the power of energetic expression, your style will be admirable and admired" (paragraph 13). Does this tell you anything? Is it sound advice? To what criterion does it evidently refer writing?

2. What does Lewes mean by the term *style*? (Paragraphs 3, 4, 16, and 19.) By treatment? (Paragraph 19.) How far is his picture of the disregard of style a true one? (Paragraphs 15-17.) Is the view of French style, in paragraph 12, a true one? (Cf. F. Brunetière: *The French Mastery of Style*, and M. Arnold: *The Literary Influence of Academies*.) Is it consistent with his later praise, as in paragraph 17, of French prose? What does Lewes say of the proper use of "models"? (Paragraphs 5 ff. Cf. Emerson: *The American Scholar*, for the same point of view, and R. L. Stevenson: *A College Magazine*, for a different method of procedure.) How does Lewes's view of originality (paragraph 5) correspond with Spencer's on the "ideal writer"? How does the principle of paragraph 6 square with Spencer's?

*The Laws of Style*

In paragraph 4 of the *Principle of Beauty*, Lewes said: "The Principle of Beauty is only another name for Style, which is an art, incomunicable as are all other arts, but like them subordinated to laws founded on psychological conditions. The laws constitute the Philosophy of Criticism; and I shall ask the reader's indulgence if for the first time I attempt to expound them scientifically in a chapter to which this present is only an introduction." It is therefore interesting to see what these laws are. His counsel, as counsel, is, like that of the preceding chapter, largely of a negative sort. Like the foregoing chapter, it is suggestive and interesting, rather than exact or profound. The "laws" of which he speaks, founded, as he is fond of saying, "on psychological necessity," turn out to be little more than very sensible precepts, which, as generalizations, one could guess at with one's eyes shut, but which, fully expounded, call for a great deal of particular knowledge of what readers do and do not like.

What is the thesis in the present chapter? What is the point of view of Lewes, that is, does he regard style from the point of view of the writer or the reader? State each of the so-called "laws." Is there any one which really includes the others? Compare them with Spencer's principle of "economy." Has Lewes added any generalization or observation which could not be found under Spencer's principle? Which is the better of the essays and why? To what degree have these "laws" a basis in "psychological demands"? Analyze the "Law of Simplicity," for example, from this point of view.

In detail, what is meant by "induction" and "deduction," as applied to exposition? (Paragraphs 37 and 38.) How do Lewes's views (paragraphs 19 and 20) on publication compare with those of De Quincey? How does his doctrine of sentences (paragraph 54) compare with Stevenson's (p. 265)?

## STEVENSON

Stevenson has, in his treatment of style, evidently "couched his lance with narrower convictions"—to use his own phrase—than his predecessors in this volume. He looks upon literature, here, not as expression of ideas, but as a somewhat superficial pattern of words. He brings up so many interesting questions, however, and is so acute in observation of the technical beauties of writing, that his essay is a very stimulating one, though it is to be recommended to the student rather as a source of delight than as a model for instruction. With this may he profitably compared Stevenson's own practice (*A College Magazine*) and his own novels and essays. Further discussion of the subject of rhythm in verse and prose is to be found conveniently in Professor

Gummere's *Hand Book of Poetics*, Professor Genung's *The Working Principles of Rhetoric*, and Professor Baldwin's *A College Manual of Rhetoric*.

1. What does Stevenson evidently mean by literature? (See especially paragraphs 4, 5, 16, and 20, as in the phrase "literary reason.") Compare Stevenson's view with that of the other writers in this volume, particularly Newman, Lewes, and Pater. In what sense does he use the term "art"? (Paragraph 4.) Compare this with Pater's view. What does he mean by the pattern? Examine such works as *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae* to see how this idea is carried out in his writing. What is Stevenson's idea of the perfect style? (Paragraphs 7, 8, and 24.) Compare Newman and Spencer.

Explain Stevenson's doctrines of the sentence; note how this is exemplified in the second and third sentences of paragraph 5. Point out other constructions illustrating the same principle. What does Stevenson mean by the "comely phrase"? (Paragraphs 11 and 16.) What is the distinction between Professor Jenkin's handling of Milton's verse (paragraph 11) and the "schoolboy" scansion? What is Stevenson's idea of good verse? (Paragraph 13.) His distinction between the charm of verse and the charm of prose? (Paragraph 10. Compare Spencer's view of rhyme.) His argument against metrical prose? (Paragraph 14.) His notion of alliteration? (Paragraphs 17-22. What of the deliberateness of the passages quoted?) His idea of variety? (Paragraph 16. Cf. Lewes; is either a law, *i.e.* a general fact?) In detail, what is meant by the term "logical progression" (paragraph 2); "demands of logic" (paragraph 6); "supersensual ear" (paragraph 6); "style is synthetic" (paragraph 7); "reasonably interesting prose" (paragraph 9)? Note other phrases of the sort.

2. What are the "sanctions" for Stevenson's doctrines of style? In what sense is his notion a matter of fact? To what degree are his general position and his particular propositions demonstrable? Test the following phrases and others like them: "We shall never learn the affinities of beauty" (paragraph 1. If true, what application is to be made to the study of style?); "Literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words" (paragraph 2); "It is, indeed, a strange art to take these blocks . . . and . . . restore them to their primal energy" (paragraph 3. What of the doctrine of usage implied in the sentence?); "Thus it is: added difficulty, added beauty" (paragraph 9. Compare this with Pater's doctrine and with Spencer's with regard to the audience addressed). If the business on which Stevenson was "embarked" was "most distasteful," why did he set sail on the quest? (Paragraph 1.) In other words, what value has his essay as an instrument in the cultivation of literary appreciation?

## PATER

The purpose of Pater's somewhat difficult essay is, as he says in the third paragraph, "to point out certain qualities of all literature as a fine art." Like Spencer, he makes use of a fundamental thesis, but the thesis differs from Spencer's in its greater insistence on the truthful expression of the writer's idea or "sense of fact," and its comparative ignoring of the "susceptibilities" of the reader. Analysis, however, will show that the two writers agree on many points, as will be evident in the course of the following questions: —

1. What, according to Pater, is the chief end of literary, as of all other, art? (Paragraph 4.) How is this fundamental idea applied to the two categories, "fact" and "the writer's sense of fact"? Does the distinction between literature and science correspond to that of Newman? What is meant by the terms "mind in style" and "soul in style"? (Paragraphs 14-16.) What is meant by "surplusage" (paragraph 12), and how does it serve to generalize Pater's conception of good literary art? Of what generalization is the example of Flaubert an illustration? (Paragraphs 17-26.) What to him was the essence of style? (Paragraph 19.) What is the difference between "good art" and "great art"? (Paragraph 31.) Explain the meaning of paragraph 29. In detail, what does Pater mean by "fine art"? (Paragraph 5.) By "real rhetorical motive"? (Paragraph 13.) By "structure"? (Paragraph 14.) By "composition"? (Paragraph 15.) How do these square with Pater's main generalization?
2. Point out any differences that you note in theory between this essay and that of Spencer. Would, for example, his generalization concerning the removal of *surplusage* correspond in any way to Spencer's theory of economy, either directly or as its complement? Is Pater's a narrower conception or point of view than Spencer's? Than Stevenson's? Does his view of literature agree with that of Newman? How does his idea of the essence of style (paragraph 19) square with Newman's notion of the great writer, or Lewes's idea of sincerity?
3. What should you say of the reality or truth or value of the following assumptions on which the essay is based? "Critical efforts to limit art *a priori*, by anticipations regarding the natural incapacity of the material with which this or that artist works, as the sculptor with solid form, or the prose writer with the ordinary language of men, are always liable to be discredited by the facts of artistic production" (paragraph 1); "The material in which he [the literary artist] works is no more a creation of his own than the sculptor's marble" (paragraph 7. Cf. Stevenson's views); "Still, as language was made for man, he [the literary artist] will be no authority for correctnesses which, limiting freedom of utterance, were yet but accidents in

their origin" (paragraph 9). What principle does Pater recognize in the foregoing quotations? Are they founded on actuality?

In detail, what should you say of the value of Pater's idea of scholarship in literary art? (Paragraph 7.) Of his insistence on the relative importance of vocabulary? (Paragraph 8.) Of his view of the sentence? (Paragraphs 7 and 11? Cf. Stevenson.) Of the perfection of *Lycidas*, *Esmond*, and *The Idea of a University*? (Paragraph 11.) In what sense may they be called "perfect"?

### FREDERIC HARRISON

Mr. Harrison's genial and informal address belongs to a large class of writings, running from Plato's *Phædrus* to his own essay, which are busied with giving general precepts and more or less sound advice to young aspirants for literary honours. The most famous essay of the kind in English, aside from Hamlet's caution to the players, cited by Mr. Harrison, is Swift's *Letter to a Young Clergyman*, in which occurs the well-known "proper words in proper places"; it is a very sensible piece of advice. Essays like those of Lewes in this volume and Schopenhauer's *Style in the Art of Literature* are written largely from this point of view, but as regards counsel do not wholly agree with one another. Like most essays of this sort, Mr. Harrison's is more remarkable as a series of keen observations and safe common sense than as a strictly accurate treatise. It is interesting to note that all the theorists of whose advice Mr. Harrison makes light (paragraphs 2-6) belong, with the exception of Professor Raleigh, to periods before De Quincey and Spencer.

1. In what different senses is the term *style* used in the course of this essay? (See, for example, paragraphs 7 and 11.) Reconstruct, by reference to paragraphs 11-17, 25, 31, and others, Mr. Harrison's ideal of the perfect style. Does it correspond with his own definition? Compare it with Spencer's "ideal writer." In what sense is prose "a plant of much later growth than poetry"? (Paragraph 18. Cf. De Quincey's essay, part 2.) From what point of view does Mr. Harrison make his specific observations on prose writers? (Cf. Professor Saintsbury's *English Prose Style*.) Compare Mr. Harrison's view of the importance of style (paragraph 9) with that of De Quincey and other essayists in this volume. How does Mr. Harrison's counsel in paragraph 11 compare with that of Lewes?

2. How sound do you regard the view of Mr. Harrison (paragraph 4) as to the absence of solid food in Horace? To what degree is the closing sentence of paragraph 5 a fair criticism of, say, Lewes's essay or other essays in this book? If Professor Raleigh's essay is the one referred to in paragraph 6, how far is the stricture on it just? Comment on the view of the writing of composition in paragraph 10; why may not composition be a worthy

means of mental training? Has Mr. Harrison a "man of straw" here, at least as regards America? Do you regard the general proposition of paragraph 15 as sound? Comparing what De Quincey has to say of Plato, with Mr. Harrison's opinion (paragraphs 15 and 16), do you think that it is or is not nonsense to say that Plato "has every mood and all are faultless"? What is a faultless mood? What does it mean to say that Plato is "never obscure, never abrupt, never tedious, never affected. He shows us, as it were, his own Athene, wisdom incarnate in immortal radiance of form"? Does not the term "natural" (*passim* and in other essays) beg the whole question when applied to style? (Cf. Pater and Stevenson.) In general, is Mr. Harrison quite consistent in his estimates of different authors?



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